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# LECTURES ON ART

BY

H. TAINE

PROFESSOR OF ÆSTHETICS AND OF THE HISTORY OF ART IN THE  
ÉCOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS, PARIS

*TRANSLATED BY*

JOHN DURAND

*FIRST SERIES*

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART  
THE IDEAL IN ART



NEW YORK  
HENRY HOJT AND COMPANY

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THE  
PHILOSOPHY OF ART



## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

### TO THE THIRD EDITION.

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THE growing appreciation of M. TAINÉ's writings gives the publishers the pleasure of issuing those now translated in a uniform edition.

The lectures on art hitherto published separately in America consist of The Philosophy of Art, The Ideal in Art, Art in the Netherlands, and Art in Greece. The first two are now included in this volume, the last two together with the lecture on Art in Italy (not before published in America) are gathered into a volume uniform with this, as a second series. The two present volumes include all that M. TAINÉ has written on distinctively Art topics.

*September, 1875.*





## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

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THE translation herewith presented to the reader consists of a course of Lectures delivered during the winter of 1864, before the students of Art of the *École des Beaux Arts* at Paris, by H. TAINÉ, *Professeur d'Esthétique et d'Histoire de l'Art* in that institution.

These lectures, as a system of *Æsthetics*, consist of an application of the experimental method to art, in the same manner as it is applied to the sciences. Whatever utility the system possesses is due to this principle. The author undertakes to explain art by social influences and other causes; humanity at different times and places, climate, and other conditions, furnish the facts on which the theory rests. The artistic development of any age or people is made intelligible through a series of historical inductions terminating in a few inferential laws, constituting what the title of the book declares it to be—the *philosophy of art*

Such a system seems to possess many advantages. Among others, it tends to emancipate the student of art, as well as the amateur, from metaphysical and visionary theories growing out of false theories and traditional misconceptions ; he is not misled by an exclusive adherence to particular schools, masters, or epochs. It also tends to render criticism less capricious, and therefore less injurious ; dictating no conventional standard of judgment, it promotes a spirit of charity towards all works. As there is no attempt to do more than explain art according to natural laws, the reader must judge whether, like all systems assuming to bring order out of confusion, this one fulfills its mission.

Readers familiar with M. TAINE'S able and original work on English literature (*Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise*) will recognize in the following pages the same theory applied to arts as is therein applied to literature.

J. D.

LONDON, *November 9, 1865.*

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

---

SINCE the publication of the first edition of the "*Philosophy of Art*," seven years ago, in London, its author has become deservedly popular, and especially in this country. His writings are sought for, read and translated both in England and on the continent of Europe, and it would be but refining gold to say aught in his praise. Like every man of genius he has, as time moves on, improved in his order of thought and in his wonderfully artistic style. His latest work, "*On Intelligence*," ranks him as high among thinkers, as his former works among men of letters.

The present edition is a careful revision of the former one, and amounts, indeed, to a new translation. Were either to be compared with the original, no change of sense could probably be detected. The present edition, however, being

much more literal, the translator considers it an improvement, and hopes that it will be found more worthy of its gifted author, the publishers, his indulgent critics, and the public generally.

**J. D.**

SOUTH ORANGE, N. J.,

*January, 1873.*

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ON  
THE NATURE OF THE WORK OF ART

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GENTLEMEN :

In commencing this course of lectures I wish to ask you two things of which I stand in great need : in the first place, your attention ; afterwards, and especially, your kind indulgence. The warmth of your reception persuades me that you will favor me with both. Let me sincerely and earnestly thank you beforehand. The subject with which I intend to entertain you this year is the history of art, and, principally, the history of painting in Italy. Before entering on the subject itself, I desire to indicate to you its spirit and method.



## I.

The principal point of this method consists in recognizing that a work of art is not isolated, and, consequently, that it is necessary to study the conditions out of which it proceeds and by which it is explained.

The first step is not difficult. At first, and evidently, a work of art—a picture, a tragedy, a statue—belongs to a certain whole, that is to say, to the entire work of the artist producing it. This is elementary. It is well known that the different works of an artist bear a family likeness, like the children of one parent; that is to say, they bear a certain resemblance to each other. We know that every artist has his own style, a style recognized in all his productions. If he is a painter, he has his own coloring, rich or impoverished; his favorite types, noble or ignoble; his attitudes, his mode of composition, even his

processes of execution; his favorite pigments, tints, models, and manner of working. If he is a writer, he has his own characters, calm or passionate; his own plots, simple or complex; his own dénouements, comic or tragic, his peculiarities of style, his pet periods, and even his special vocabulary. This is so true, that a connoisseur, if you place him before a work not signed by any prominent master, is able to recognize, to almost a certainty, to what artist this work belongs, and, if sufficiently experienced and delicate in his perceptions, the period of the artist's life, and the particular stage of his development.

This is the first whole to which we must refer a work of art. And here is the second. The artist himself, considered in connection with his productions, is not isolated; he also belongs to a whole, one greater than himself, comprising the school or family of artists of the time and country to which he belongs. For example, around Shakespeare, who, at the first glance, seems to be a marvelous celestial gift coming like an aerolite

from heaven, we find several dramatists of a high order--Webster, Ford, Massinger, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher—all of whom wrote in the same style and in the same spirit as he did. There are the same characters in their dramas as in Shakespeare's, the same violent and terrible characters, the same murderous and unforeseen occurrences, the same sudden and frenzied passions, the same irregular, capricious, turgid, magnificent style, the same exquisite poetic feeling for rural life and landscape, and the same delicate, tender, affectionate ideals of woman.

In a similar way Rubens is to be judged. Rubens apparently stands alone, without either predecessor or successor. On going to Belgium, however, and visiting the churches of Ghent, Brussels, Bruges, or Antwerp, you find a group of painters with genius resembling his. First, there is Crayer, in his day considered a rival; Seghers, Van Oost, Everdingen, Van Thulden, Quellin, Hondthorst, and others, with whom you are familiar, Jordaens, Van Dyck—all conceiving

painting in the same spirit, and with many distinctive features, all preserving a family likeness. Like Rubens, these artists delighted in painting ruddy and healthy flesh, the rich and quivering palpitation of life, the fresh and sensuous pulp which is diffused so richly over the surface of the living being, the real, and often brutal types, the transport and abandonment of unfettered action, the splendid lustrous and embroidered draperies, the varying hues of silk and purple, and the display of shifting and waving folds. At the present day they seem to be obscured by the glory of their great contemporary; but it is not the less true that to comprehend him it is necessary to study him amidst this cluster of brilliants of which he is the brightest gem—this family of artists, of which he is the most illustrious representative.

This being the second step, there now remains the third. This family of artists is itself comprehended in another whole more vast, which is the world surrounding it, and whose taste is similar. The social and intellectual condition is the same for the public as for artists; they are not isolated



men; it is their voice alone that we hear at this moment, through the space of centuries, but, beneath this living voice which comes vibrating to us, we distinguish a murmur, and, as it were, a vast, low sound, the great infinite and varied voice of the people, chanting in unison with them. They have been great through this harmony, and it is very necessary that it should ever be so. Phidias and Ictinus, the constructors of the Parthenon and of the Olympian Jupiter, were, like other Athenians, pagans and free citizens, brought up in the *palæstra*, exercising and wrestling naked, and accustomed to deliberate and vote in the public assemblies; possessing the same habits, the same interests, the same ideas, the same faith; men of the same race, the same education, the same language; so that in all the important acts of their life they are found in harmony with their spectators.

This harmony becomes still more apparent if we consider an age nearer our own. For example, take the great Spanish epoch of the sixteenth and a part of the seventeenth centuries, in which

lived the great painters, Velasquez, Murillo, Zurbaran, Francisco de Herrera, Alonzo Cano, and Morales; and the great poets, Lope de Vega, Calderon, Cervantes, Tirso de Molina, Don Luis de Leon, Guilhem de Castro, and so many others. You know that at this time Spain was entirely monarchical and Catholic; that she had overcome the Turks at Lepanto; that she planted her foot in Africa and maintained herself there; that she combated the Protestants in Germany, pursued them in France and attacked them in England; that she subdued and converted the idolaters of the new world, and chased away Jews and Moors from her own soil; that she purged her own faith with auto-da-fés and persecutions; that she lavished fleets and armies, and the gold and silver of her American possessions, along with her most precious children, the vital blood of her own heart, upon multiplied and boundless crusades, so obstinately and so fanatically, that at the end of a century and a half she fell prostrate at the feet of Europe, but with such enthusiasm, such a burst of glory, such national fervor,

that her subjects, enamored of the monarchy in which their power was concentrated, and with the cause to which they devoted their lives, felt no other desire than that of elevating religion and royalty by their obedience, and of forming around the Church and the Throne a choir of faithful, militant, and adoring supporters. In this monarchy of crusaders and inquisitors, preserving the chivalric sentiments and sombre passions, the ferocity, intolerance, and mysticism of the middle ages, the greatest artists are the very men who possessed in the highest degree the faculties, sentiments, and passions of the public that surrounded them. The most celebrated poets—Lope de Vega and Calderon—were military adventurers, volunteers in the Armada, duelists and lovers, as exalted and as mystic in love as the poets and Don Quixotes of feudal times; they were passionate Catholics and so ardent that, at the end of their lives, one became a familiar of the Inquisition, others became priests, and the most illustrious among them—the great Lope de Vega—fainted on saying Mass, at the thought of

the sacrifice and martyrdom of Jesus. Every-where may be found similar examples of the alliance, the intimate harmony existing between an artist and his contemporaries; and we may rest assured that if we desire to comprehend the taste or the genius of an artist, the reasons leading him to choose a particular style of painting or drama, to prefer this or that character or coloring, and to represent particular sentiments, we must seek for them in the social and intellectual conditions of the community in the midst of which he lived.

We have therefore to lay down this rule: that, in order to comprehend a work of art, an artist or a group of artists, we must clearly comprehend the general social and intellectual condition of the times to which they belong. Herein is to be found the final explanation; herein resides the primitive cause determining all that follows it. This truth, gentlemen, is confirmed by experience. In short, if we pass in review the principal epochs of the history of art, we find that the arts appear and disappear along with certain accompanying

social and intellectual conditions. For example, the Greek tragedy—that of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—appears at the time when the the Greeks were victorious over the Persians ; at the heroic era of small republican cities, at the moment of the great struggle by which they acquired their independence and established their ascendancy in the civilized world ; and we see it disappearing along with this independence and this vigor when a degeneracy of character and the Macedonian conquest delivered Greece over to strangers. It is the same with Gothic architecture, developing along with the definitive establishment of feudalism in the semi-renaissance of the eleventh century at the period when society, delivered from brigands and Normans, began to consolidate, and disappearing at the period when the military system of petty independent barons, with the manners and customs growing out of it vanished near the end of the fifteenth century, on the advent of modern monarchies. It is the same with Dutch painting, which flourished at the glorious period when, through firmness and courage,

Holland succeeded in freeing herself from Spanish rule, combated England with equal power, and became the richest, freest, most industrious, and most prosperous state in Europe : and we see it declining at the commencement of the eighteenth century, when Holland, fallen into a secondary rank, leaves the first to England, reducing itself to a well-ordered, safely-administered, quiet, commercial banking-house, in which man, an honest *bourgeois*, could live at ease, exempt from every great ambition and every grand emotion. It is the same, finally, with French tragedy appearing at the period when a noble and well-regulated monarchy, under Louis XIV., established the empire of decorum, the life of the court, “the pomp and circumstance” of society, and the elegant domestic phrases of aristocracy ; disappearing when the social rule of nobles and the manners of the ante-chamber were abolished by the Revolution.

I would like to make you more sensible by a comparison of this effect of the social and intellectual state on the Fine Arts. Suppose you are leaving the land of the south for that of the north

you perceive on entering a certain zone a particular mode of cultivation and a particular species of plant: first come the aloe and the orange; a little later, the vine and the olive; after these, the oak and the chestnut; a little further on, oats and the pine, and finally, mosses and lichens. Each zone has its own mode of cultivation and peculiar vegetation; both begin at the commencement, and both finish at the end of the zone; both are attached to it. The zone is the condition of their existence; by its presence or its absence is determined what shall appear and what shall disappear. Now, what is this zone but a certain temperature; in other words, a certain degree of heat and moisture; in short, a certain number of governing circumstances analogous in its germ to that which we called a moment ago the social and intellectual state?

Just as there is a physical temperature, which by its variations determines the appearance of this or that species of plant, so is there a moral temperature, which by its variations determines the appearance of this or that species of art. And

as we study the physical temperature in order to comprehend the advent of this or that species of plants, whether maize or oats, the orange or the pine, so is it necessary to study the moral temperature in order to comprehend the advent of various phases of art, whether pagan sculpture or realistic painting, mystic architecture or classic literature, voluptuous music or ideal poetry. The productions of the human mind, like those of animated nature, can only be explained by their *milieu*.

Hence the study I intend to offer to you this season, of the history of painting in Italy. I shall attempt to lay before your eyes the mystic *milieu*, in which appeared Giotto and Beato Angelico, and to this end I shall read passages from the poets and legendary writers, containing the ideas entertained by the men of those days concerning happiness, misery, love, faith, paradise, hell, and all the great interests of humanity. We shall find documentary evidence in the poetry of Dante of Guido Cavalcanti, of the Franciscans, in the Golden Legend, in the Imitation of Jesus Christ



in the Fioretti of St. Francis, in the works of historians like Dino Campagni, and in that vast collection of chroniclers by Muratori, which so naïvely portray the jealousies and disturbances of the small Italian republics. After this I shall attempt to place before you in the same manner the pagan *milieu* which a century and a half later produced Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo, Raphael and Titian, and to this end I shall read, either from the memoirs of contemporaries—Benvenuto Cellini for instance—or from the diverse chronicles kept daily in Rome and in the principal Italian cities, or from the dispatches of ambassadors, or, finally, from the descriptions of fêtes, masquerades, and civic receptions, which are remarkable fragments, displaying the brutality, sensuality, and vigor of society, as well as the lively poetic sentiment, the love of the picturesque, the great literary sentiment, the decorative instincts, and the passion for external splendor which at that time are seen as well among the people and the ignorant crowd as among the great and the lettered.

Suppose now, gentlemen, we should succeed in this undertaking, and that we should be able to mark clearly and precisely the various intellectual conditions which have led to the birth of Italian painting—its development, its bloom, its varieties and decline. Suppose the same undertaking successful with other countries, and other ages, and with the different branches of art, architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, and music. Suppose, that through the effect of all these discoveries, we succeed in defining the nature, and in marking the conditions of existence of each art, we shall then have a complete explanation of the Fine Arts, and of art in general; that is to say, a philosophy of the Fine Arts—what is called an *æsthetic* system. This is what we aim at, gentlemen, and nothing else. Ours is modern, and differs from the ancient, inasmuch as it is historic, and not dogmatic; that is to say, it imposes no precepts, but ascertains and verifies laws. Ancient *æsthetics* gave, at first, a definition of beauty, and declared, for instance, that the beautiful is the expression of the moral ideal, or

rather is the expression of the invisible, or rather still, is the expression of the human passions ; then starting hence, as from an article of a code, they absolved, condemned, admonished, and directed. It is my good fortune not to have such a formidable task to meet. I do not wish to guide you—it would embarrass me too much. Besides, I say with all humility, that, as to precepts, we have as yet found but two : the first is to be born a genius, an affair of your parents, and not mine ; and the second, which implies much labor in order to master art, which likewise does not depend on me, but on yourselves. My sole duty is to offer you facts, and show you how these facts are produced. The modern method, which I strive to pursue, and which is beginning to be introduced in all the moral sciences, consists in considering human productions, and particularly works of art, as facts and productions of which it is essential to mark the characteristics and seek the causes, and nothing more. Thus understood, science neither pardons nor proscribes ; it verifies and explains. It does

not say to you, despise Dutch art because it is vulgar, and prize only Italian art ; nor does it say to you despise Gothic art because it is morbid, and prize only Greek art. It leaves every one free to follow their own predilections, to prefer that which is germane to one's temperament, and to study with the greatest care that which best corresponds to the development of one's own mind. Science has sympathies for all the forms of art, and for all schools, even for those the most opposed to each other. It accepts them as so many manifestations of the human mind, judging that the more numerous they are, and the more antithetical, the more they show the human mind in its innumerable and novel phases. It is analogous to botany, which studies the orange, the laurel, the pine, and the birch, with equal interest ; it is itself a species of botany, applied not to plants, but to the works of man. By virtue of this it keeps pace with the general movement of the day, which now affiliates the moral sciences with the natural sciences, and which, giving to the first the principles, precau-

tions, and directions of the second, gives to them the same stability, and assures them the same progress.

## II.

I WISH to apply at once this method to the first and principal question by which a course of æsthetics is opened out, and which is a definition of art. What is art, and in what does its nature consist? Instead of establishing a formula, I wish to familiarize you with facts, for facts exist here as elsewhere—positive facts open to observation; I mean *works of art* arranged by families in galleries and libraries, like plants in an herb-arium, and animals in a museum. Analysis may be applied to the one as to the others; a work of art may be investigated generally, as we investigate a plant or an animal generally. There is no more need of discarding experience in the first case than in the second; the entire process consists in discovering, by numerous comparisons and progressive eliminations, traits common to all works of art, and, at the same time, the distinctive traits by which works of art are separa-

ted from other productions of the human intellect.

To this end we will, among the five great arts of poetry, sculpture, painting, architecture, and music, set aside the last two, of which the explanation is more difficult, and to which we will return afterwards; we shall at present consider only the first three. All, as you are aware, possess a common character, that of being more or less *imitative* arts.

At the first glance, it seems that this is their principal character, and their object is imitation as exact as possible. For it is plain that a statue is meant to imitate accurately a really living man; that a picture is intended to portray real persons in real attitudes, the interior of a house and a landscape, such as nature presents. It is no less evident that a drama, a romance, attempts to represent faithfully characters, actions, and actual speech, and to give as precise and as accurate a picture of them as is possible. When, accordingly, the image is inadequate or inexact, we say to the sculptor, "This breast or this limb

is not well executed ;” and to the painter, “The figures of your background are too large—the coloring of your trees is faulty ;” and we say to the author, “Never did man feel or think as you have imagined him.”

But there are other proofs, still stronger, and first, every-day experience. When we behold what takes place in the life of an artist, we perceive that it is generally divided into two sections. During the first, in the youth and maturity of his talent, he sees things as they are, and studies them minutely and earnestly ; he fixes his eyes on them ; he labors and worries to express them, and he expresses them with more than scrupulous fidelity. Arriving at a certain moment of life, he thinks he understands them thoroughly and discovers no more novelty in them ; he casts aside the living model, and with certain prescribed rules which he has picked up in the course of his experience he forms a drama or a romance, a picture or a statue. The first epoch is that of natural feeling ; the second that of mannerism and decline. If we penetrate the lives of



the greatest men, we rarely fail to discover both. In the life of Michael Angelo, the first period lasted a long time, a little less than sixty years; all the works belonging to it disclose the sentiment of force and heroic grandeur. The artist is imbued with it; he has no other thought. His numerous dissections, his countless drawings, the unremitted analysis of his own heart, his study of the tragic passions and of their physical expression, are for him but the means of manifesting outwardly the militant energy with which he is carried away. This idea descends upon you from every corner of the great vault of the Sistine chapel. Enter the Pauline chapel alongside of it, and contemplate the works of his old age—the Conversion of St. Paul, the Crucifixion of St. Peter; consider even the Last Judgment, which he painted in his seventy-seventh year. Connoisseurs, and those who are not, recognize at once that the two frescoes are executed according to prescribed rules; that an artist possessed a certain number of forms, which he used conventionally; that he multiplied extraordinary attitudes,

and ingeniously contrived foreshortenings; that the lively invention, naturalness, the great transport of the heart, the perfect truth peculiar to his first works, have, at least in part, disappeared from the abuse of technique and the force of routine; and that if he is still superior to others, he is greatly inferior to himself.

The same comment may be made on another life—that of our French Michael Angelo, Corneille. In the first years of his life, Corneille was likewise struck by the feeling of force, and of moral heroism. He found it around him in the vigorous passions bequeathed by the religious wars to the new monarchy; in the daring acts of duelists; in the proud feeling of honor which still carried away the devotees of feudalism; in the bloody tragedies which the plots of princes and the executions of Richelieu furnished as spectacles for the court; and he created personages like *Chimène* and the *Cid*, like *Polyeucte* and *Pauline*, like *Cornélie*, *Sertorius*, *Emilie*, and *les Horaces*. Afterwards he produced *Pertharite*, *Attila*, and other feeble works, in which the situations

merge into the horrible, and generous emotions lose themselves in extravagance. In this period the living models he once contemplated no longer had a social setting; at least he no longer sought them, he failed to renew his inspiration. He was governed by prescribed rules due to the memory of processes which he had formerly found in the heat of enthusiasm, literary theories, dissertations and distinctions on theatrical catastrophes and dramatic licenses. He copied and exaggerated himself; learning, calculation and routine shut out from him the direct and personal contemplation of powerful emotions and of noble actions; he no longer created, but manufactured.

It is not alone the history of this or that great man which proves to us the necessity of imitating the living model, and of keeping the eye fixed on nature, but rather the history of every great school of art. Every school (I believe without exception) degenerates and falls, simply through its neglect of exact imitation, and its abandonment of the living model. You see it in painting, in the fabricators of muscles and exaggerated attitudes

who succeeded Michael Angelo ; in the sciolists of theatrical decorations and in the brawny rotundities which have followed the great Venetians ; and in the great boudoir and alcove painters which closed the French school of art of the eighteenth century. The same thing occurs in literature, with the versifiers and rhetoricians of the Latin decadence ; with the sensual and declamatory playwrights closing the bright periods of the English drama, and with the manufacturers of sonnets, puns, witticisms, and bombast of the Italian decline. Among these I will cite two striking examples. The first is the decline of sculpture and painting in antiquity, of which you obtain a vivid impression by visiting Pompeii, and afterwards Ravenna. At Pompeii the painting and sculpture belong to the first century of the present era ; at Ravenna the mosaics are of the sixth century, about the times of the Emperor Justinian. In this interval of five centuries art becomes irremediably corrupt, and its degeneracy is wholly due to the neglect of the living model. In the first century the pagan manners and tastes

of the *palaestra* still existed. Men wore their vestments loose and cast them off easily, frequented the baths, exercised in a state of nudity, witnessed the combats of the circus, ever contemplating sympathetically and intelligently the active movements of the living body. Their sculptors and painters, surrounded by nude and half-nude forms, were capable of reproducing them. Accordingly, you will see on the walls of Pompeii, in the little oratories and in the inner courts, beautiful dancing females, spirited, supple young heroes, with manly chests, agile feet, every posture and form of the body rendered with an ease and accuracy to which the most elaborate study of the present day cannot attain. During the following five hundred years everything gradually changes. Pagan manners, the use of the *palaestra*, and the love of the nude, disappear. The body is no longer exposed, but concealed under complicated drapery, and under a display of lace, purple, and oriental magnificence. People no longer esteem the wrestler and the youthful gymnast,\*

but the eunuch, the scribe, the monk, and the woman. Asceticism gains ground, and with it a love for listless reverie, nollow disputation, scribbling and wrangling. The worn-out babblers of the Lower Empire replace the valiant Greek athletes and the hardy combatants of Rome. By degrees the knowledge and study of the living model are interdicted. People have discarded it. Their eyes rest only on the works of ancient masters, and they copy these. Soon copies are only made of copies, and again copies of these, so that each generation recedes a step from the original type. The artist ceases to have his own idea and his own feeling, and becomes a copying machine. The Fathers declare that he must invent nothing, but must adhere to lineaments prescribed by tradition and sanctioned by authority. This separation of the artist from the living model brings art to the condition in which you see it at Ravenna. At the end of five centuries, artists can only represent man in two ways—seated and standing; other attitudes are too difficult, and are beyond their capacity. Hands and feet ap-

pear rigid as if fractured, the folds of drapery are wooden, figures seem to be manikins, and heads are invaded by the eyes. Art is like an invalid sinking under a mortal consumption; it is languishing, and about to expire.

In a different branch of art amongst ourselves, and in a neighboring century, we find again a similar decline, and brought about by similar causes. In the age of Louis XIV., literature attained to a perfect style, to a purity, to a precision, to a sobriety of which we have no example; dramatic art, especially, created a language and a style of versification deemed by all Europe a masterpiece of the human intellect. This is due to the fact of writers finding their models around them and constantly observing them. The language of Louis XIV. was perfect, displaying a dignity, eloquence, and gravity truly royal. We know by the letters, dispatches, and memoirs of the court personages of that time, that an aristocratic tone, sustained elegance, propriety of terms, dignified manners, and the art of correct speaking, were as common to courtiers as to monarch; so that the

writer frequenting their society, had but to draw on his memory and experience in order to obtain the very best materials of his art.



### III.

Is this true in every particular, and must we conclude that absolutely exact imitation is the end of art?

If this were so, gentlemen, absolutely exact imitation would produce the finest works. But, in fact, it is not so. In sculpture, for instance, casting is the process by which a faithful and minute impression of a model is obtained, and certainly a good cast is not equal to a good statue. Again, and in another domain, photography is the art which completely reproduces with lines and tints on a flat surface, without possible mistake, the forms and modeling of the object imitated. Photography is undoubtedly a useful auxiliary to painting, and is sometimes tastefully employed by cultivated and intelligent men; but after all, no one thinks of comparing it with painting. And finally, as a last illustration, if it were true that exact imitation is the supreme

aim of art, let me ask what would be the best tragedy? the best comedy? the best drama? A stenographic report of a criminal trial, every word of which is faithfully recorded. It is clear, however, that if we sometimes encounter in it flashes of nature and occasional outbursts of sentiment, these are but veins of pure metal in a mass of worthless dross; it may furnish a writer with materials for his art, but it does not constitute a work of art.

Some may possibly say, that photography, casting, and stenography are mechanical processes, and that we ought to leave mechanism out of the question, and accordingly limit our comparisons to man's work. Let us, therefore, select works by artists conspicuous for minute fidelity. There is a canvas in the Louvre by Denner. This artist worked microscopically, taking four years to finish a portrait. Nothing in his heads is overlooked—the finest lines and wrinkles, the faintly mottled surface of the cheeks, the black specks scattered over the nose, the bluish flush of imperceptible veins meander-

ing under the skin, nor the reflection of objects in the vicinity on the eye. We are struck with astonishment. This head is a perfect illusion ; it seems to project out of the frame. Such success and such patience are unparalleled. Substantially, however, a broad sketch by Van Dyck is a hundredfold more powerful. Beside, neither in painting nor in any other art are prizes awarded to deceptions.

A second and stronger proof, that exact imitation is not the end of art, is to be found in this fact, that certain arts are purposely inexact. There is sculpture, for instance. A statue is generally of one color, either of bronze or of marble ; and again, the eyes are without eyeballs. It is just this uniformity of tint, and this modification of moral expression, which completes its beauty. Examine corresponding works, in which imitation is pushed to extremity. The churches of Naples and Spain contain draped statues, colored ; saints in actual monastic garb, with yellow earthy skins, suitable to ascetics, and bleeding hands and wounded sides characteristic

of the martyred. · Alongside of these appear madonnas, in royal robes, in festive dresses, and in bright silks, crowned with diadems, wearing precious necklaces, brilliant ribbons, and magnificent laces, and with rosy complexions, glittering eyes, and eyeballs formed of carbuncles. By this excess of literal imitation, the artist gives no pleasure, but repugnance, often disgust, and sometimes horror.

It is the same in literature. The best half of dramatic poetry, every classic Greek and French drama, and the greater part of Spanish and English dramas, far from literally copying ordinary conversation, intentionally modify human speech. Each of these dramatic poets makes his characters speak in verse, casting their dialogue in rhythm, and often in rhyme. Is this modification prejudicial to the work? Far from it. One of the great works of the age, the "Iphigenia" of Goethe, which was at first written in prose and afterwards re-written in verse, affords abundant evidence of this. It is beautiful in prose, but in verse what a difference! The modification of

ordinary language, in the introduction of rhythm and metre, evidently gives to this work its incomparable accent, that calm sublimity, that broad, sustained tragic tone, which elevates the spirit above the low level of common life, and brings before the eye the heroes of ancient days—that lost race of primitive souls—and, among them, the august virgin, interpreter of the gods, custodian of the laws, and the benefactress of mankind, in whom is concentrated whatever is noble and good in human nature, in order to glorify our species and renew the inspiration of our hearts.

#### IV.

It is essential, then, to closely imitate something in an object; but not everything. We have now to discover what imitation should be applied to. Anticipating an answer to this, I reply, "To the relationships and mutual dependence of parts." Excuse this abstract definition—I will make my meaning clearer to you.

Imagine yourselves before a living model, man or woman, with a pencil, and a piece of paper twice the dimensions of your hand, on which to copy it. Certainly, you cannot be expected to reproduce the magnitude of the limbs, for your paper is too small; nor can you be expected to reproduce their color, for you have only black and white to work with. What you have to do is to reproduce their *relationships*, and first the proportions, that is to say, the relationships of magnitude. If the head is of a certain length, the body must be so many times longer than the

head, the arm of a length equally dependent on that, and the leg the same; and so on with the other members. Again, you are required to reproduce forms, or the relationships of position: this or that curve, oval, angle, or sinuosity in the model must be repeated in the copy by a line of the same nature. In short, your object is to reproduce the aggregate of relationships, by which the parts are linked together, and nothing else; it is not the simple corporeal appearance that you have to give, but the *logic* of the whole body.

Suppose, in like manner, you are contemplating some actual character, some scene in real life, high or low, and you are asked to furnish a description of it. To do this you have your eyes, your ears, your memory, and, perhaps, a pencil, to dot down five or six notes—no great means, but ample for your purpose. What is expected of you is, not to record every word and motion, all the actions of the personage, or of the fifteen or twenty persons that are figured before you, but, as before, to note proportions, connections, and relationships; you are expected, in the first

place, to keep exactly the proportion of the actions of the personage, in other words, to give prominence to ambitious acts, if he is ambitious, to avaricious acts, if he is avaricious, and to violent acts, if he is violent; after this, to observe the reciprocal connection of these same acts; that is to say, to provoke one reply by another, to originate a resolution, a sentiment, an idea by an idea, a sentiment, a preceding resolution, and moreover by the actual condition of the personage; in addition to that, still by the general character bestowed on him. In short, in the literary effort, as in the pictorial effort, it is important to transcribe, not the visible outlines of persons and events, but the aggregate of their relationships and inter-dependencies, that is to say, their logic.

As a general rule, therefore, whatever interests us in a real personage, and which we entreat the artist to extract and render, is his outward or inward logic; in other terms, his structure, composition and action.

We have here, as you perceive, corrected the



first definition given ; it is not canceled, but purified. We have discovered a more elevated character for art, which thus becomes intellectual, and not mechanical.

## V.

DOES this suffice us? Do we find works of art simply confined to a reproduction of the relationships of parts? By no means, for the greatest schools are justly those in which actual relationships are most modified. Consider, for example, the Italian school in its greatest artist, Michael Angelo, and, in order to give precision to our ideas, let us recall his principal work, the four marble statues surmounting the tomb of the Medicis at Florence. Those of you who have not seen the originals, are at least familiar with copies of them. In the figures of these men, and especially in the reclining females, sleeping or waking, the proportions of the parts are certainly not the same as in real personages. Similar figures exist nowhere, even in Italy. You will see there young, handsome, well-dressed men, peasants with bright eyes and a fierce expression, academy models with firm muscles and a proud

bearing ; but neither in a village nor at festivities, nor in the studios of Italy or elsewhere, at the present time or in the sixteenth century, does any real man or woman resemble the indignant heroes and the colossal despairing virgins which this great artist has placed before us in this funereal chapel. Michael Angelo found these types in his own genius and in his own heart. In order to create them it was necessary to have the soul of a recluse, of a meditative man, of a lover of justice ; the soul of an impassioned and generous nature bewildered in the midst of enervated and corrupt beings, amidst treachery and oppression, before the inevitable triumph of tyranny and injustice, under the ruins of liberty and of nationality, himself threatened with death, feeling that if he lived it was only by favor, and perhaps only by a short respite, incapable of sycophancy and of submission, taking refuge entirely in that art by which, in the silence of servitude, his great heart and his great despair still spoke. He wrote on the pedestal of his sleeping statue, "Sleep is sweet, and yet more sweet is it

to be of stone, while shame and misery last  
Fortunate am I not to see—not to feel. Forbear  
to arouse me! Ah! speak low!”

This is the sentiment which revealed to him such forms. To express it, he has changed the ordinary proportions; he has lengthened the trunk and the limbs, twisted the torso upon the hips, hollowed out the sockets of the eyes, furrowed the forehead with wrinkles similar to the lion's frowning brow, raised mountains of muscles on the shoulder, ridged the spine with tendons, and so fastened the vertebræ that it resembles the links of an iron chain strained to their utmost tension and about to break.

Let us consider, in like manner, the Flemish school; and in this school the great Fleming, Rubens, and one of the most striking of his works, the “Kermesse.” In this work, no more than in those of Michael Angelo, will you find an imitation of ordinary proportions. Visit Flanders, and observe the types of mankind about you, even at feastings and revelings, such as the fêtes of Gayant, Antwerp, and other places.

You will see comfortable-looking people eating much and drinking more ; serenely smoking, cool phlegmatic bodies ; dull-looking, and with massive, irregular features, strongly resembling the figures of Teniers. As to the splendid brutes of the "Kermesse," you meet nothing like them ! Rubens certainly found them elsewhere. After the horrible religious wars, this rich country of Flanders, so long devastated, finally attained peace and civil security. The soil is so good, and the people so prudent, comfort and prosperity returned almost at once. Everybody enjoyed this new prosperity and abundance ; the contrast between the past and the present led to the indulgence of rude and carnal instincts let loose like horses and cattle after long privation in fresh, green fields, abounding in the richest pasture. Rubens himself was sensible of them ; and the poetry of gross, sumptuous living, of satisfied and redundant flesh, of brutal, inordinate merry-making, found a ready outlet in the shameless sensualities and voluptuous ruddiness, in the whiteness and freshness of the nudities of which

he was so prodigal. In order to express all this in the "Kermesse" he has expanded the trunk, enlarged the thighs, twisted the loins, deepened the redness of the cheeks, disheveled the hair, kindled in the eyes a flame of savage, unbridled desire, unloosed the demons of disorder in the shape of shattered glasses, overturned tables, howlings and kissings, a perfect orgie, and the most extraordinary culmination of human bestiality ever portrayed upon canvas.

These two examples show you that the artist, in modifying the relationships of parts, modifies them understandingly, purposely, in such a way as to make apparent the *essential character* of the object, and consequently its leading idea according to his conception of it. This phrase, gentlemen, requires attention; this essential character is what philosophers call the *essence* of things; and because of this they say that it is the aim of art to manifest the essence of things. We will not retain this term essence, which is technical, but simply state that it is the aim of art to manifest a predominant character, some salient prin-

principal quality, some important point of view, some essential condition of being in the object.

We here approach the true definition of art, and accordingly need to be perfectly clear. We must insist on and precisely define essential character. I would premise at once that it is a *quality from which all others, or at least most other qualities, are derived according to definite affinities.* Grant me again this abstract definition: a few illustrations will make it plain to you.

The essential character of a lion, giving him his rank in the classifications of natural history, is that of a great flesh-eater; nearly all his traits, whether physical or moral, as I am about to prove to you, are derived from this trait as their fountain-head. First, there are physical traits: his teeth move like shears; he has a jaw constructed to tear and to crush; and necessarily, for, being carnivorous, he has to nourish himself with, and prey upon, living game; in order to manœuvre this formidable instrument he requires enormous muscles, and for their insertion, temporal sockets of proportionate size. Add to the

by depends. It is determined by a perception & abstract ideas of ideation.

feet other instruments, the terrible contractile claws, the quick step on the extremity of the toes, a terrible elasticity of the thighs acting like a powerful spring, and eyes that see best at night, because night is the best hunting-time. A naturalist, pointing to a lion's skeleton, once said to me, "There is a jaw mounted on four paws."

The moral points of the lion are likewise in harmony. At first, there is the sanguinary instinct—the craving for fresh flesh, and a repugnance for every other food; next, the strength and the nervous excitement through which the lion concentrates an enormous amount of force at the instant of attack and defense; and, on the other hand, his somniferous habits, the grave, sombre inertia of moments of repose, and the long yawnings after the excitement of the chase. All these traits are derived from his carnivorous character, and on this account we call it his essential character.

Let us now consider a more difficult case, that of an entire country, with its innumerable details of structure, aspect, and cultivation; its plants,



animals, inhabitants, and towns ; as, for example, the Low Countries. The essential character of this region is its *alluvial* formation ; that is to say, a formation due to vast quantities of earth brought down by streams and deposited about their mouths. From this single term spring an infinity of peculiarities, summing up the entire nature of the country, not only its physical outlines, what it is in itself, but again the intellectual, moral, and physical qualities of its inhabitants, and of their works. At first, in the inanimate world, come its moist and fertile plains, the necessary consequence of numerous broad rivers and vast deposits of productive soil. These plains are always green, because broad, tranquil, and sluggish streams, and the innumerable canals so easily constructed in soft, flat ground, maintain perennial verdure. You can readily imagine, and on purely rational principles, the aspect of such a country—a dull, rainy sky, constantly streaked with showers, and even on fine days veiled as if by gauze with light vapory clouds rising from the wet surface, forming a trans-

parent dome, an airy tissue of delicate, snowy fleeces, over the broad verdant expanse stretching out of sight and rounded to the distant horizon. In the animated kingdom these numerous luxuriant pastures attract countless herds of cattle, who recline tranquilly on the grass, or ruminate over their cud, and dot the flat green sward with innumerable spots of white, yellow, and black. Hence the rich stores of milk and meat, which, added to the grains and vegetables raised on this prolific soil, furnish its inhabitants with cheap and abundant supplies of food. It might well be said that in this country water makes grass, grass makes cattle, cattle make cheese, butter, and meat; and all these, with beer, make the inhabitant. Indeed, out of this fat living, and out of this physical organization saturated with moisture, spring the phlegmatic temperament, the regular habits, the tranquil mind and nerves, the capacity to take life easily and prudently, unbroken contentment and love of well-being, and, consequently, the reign of cleanliness and the perfection of comfort. These conse-

quences extend so far as even to affect the aspect of towns. In an alluvial country there is no stone; building material consists of terra-cotta, bricks, and tiles. Rains being frequent and heavy, roofs are very sloping, and as dampness lasts a long time, their fronts are painted and varnished. A Flemish town, therefore, is a network of brown or red edifices always neat, occasionally glittering and with pointed gables; here and there rises an old church constructed of shingle or of rubble; streets in the best of order run between two scrupulously clean lines of sidewalk. In Holland the sidewalks are laid in brick, frequently intermingled with coarse porcelain: domestics may be seen at an early hour in the morning on their knees cleaning them off with cloths. Cast your eyes through the dazzling window-panes; enter a club-room decked with green branches, with its floor powdered with sand constantly renewed; visit the taverns, brightly painted, where rows of casks display their brown rotund sides, and where the rich yellow beer foams up out of glasses covered with

quaint devices. In all these details of common life, in all these signs of inward contentment and enduring prosperity, you detect the effects of the great underlying characteristic which is stamped upon the climate and the soil, upon the vegetable kingdom and the animal kingdom, upon man and his works, upon society and the individual.

Through these innumerable effects, you judge of the importance of this essential character. It is this which art must bring forward into proper light, and if this task devolves upon art, it is because nature fails to accomplish it. In nature, this essential character is simply dominant; it is the aim of art to render it predominant. It moulds real objects, but it does not mould them completely: its action is restricted, impeded by the intervention of other causes; its impression on objects bearing its stamp is not sufficiently strong to be clearly visible. Man is sensible of this deficiency, and to remove it he has invented art.

Let us again take up Rubens' "Kermesse." These blooming merry wives, these roistering

drunkards, these busts and visages of burly unbridled brutes, probably found counterparts in the carousals of the day. Over-nourished and exuberant nature aimed at producing such gross forms and such coarse manners, but she only half accomplished her task; other causes intervened to stay this excess of a carnal, jovial energy. There is, at first, poverty. In the best of times, and in the best countries, many people have not enough to eat, and fasting, at least partial abstinence, misery, and bad air, all the accompaniments of indigence, diminish the development and boisterousness of native brutality. A suffering man is not so strong, and more sober. Religion, police regulations, and habits due to steady labor, operate in the same direction; education does its part. Out of a hundred subjects who, under favorable conditions, might have furnished Rubens with models, only five or six, perhaps, could be of any service to him. Suppose now that these five or six figures in the actual festivities which he might have seen were lost in a crowd of people more or less indifferent and common

consider again, that at the moment they came under his eye they exhibited neither the attitude, the expression, the gestures, the abandonment, the costume, or the disorder requisite to make this teeming excitement apparent. Through all these drawbacks nature called art to its aid; she could not clearly distinguish the character; it was necessary that the artist should supplement her.

Thus is it with every superior work of art. While Raphael was painting his "Galatea," he wrote that, beautiful women being scarce, he was following a conception of his own. This means that, looking at human nature from a certain point of view, its repose, its felicity, its gracious and dignified sweetness, he found no living model to express it satisfactorily. The peasant or laboring girl, who posed for him had hands deformed by work, feet spoiled by their covering, and eyes disordered by shame, or demoralized by her calling. His "Fornarina" has drooping shoulders, a meagre arm above the elbow, a hard and contracted expres-

sion.\* If he painted her in the Farnesini Palace, he completely transformed her, developing a character in his painted figure of which the real figure only contributed parts and suggestions.

Thus the province of a work of art is to render the essential character, or, at least, some capital quality, the predominance of which must be made as perceptible as possible. In order to accomplish this the artist must suppress whatever conceals it, select whatever manifests it, correct every detail by which it is enfeebled, and recast those in which it is neutralized.

Let us no longer consider works but artists, that is to say, the way in which artists feel, invent, and produce: you will find it consistent with the foregoing conception of the work of art. There is one gift indispensable to all artists; no study, no degree of patience, supplies its place; if it is wanting in them they are nothing but copyists and mechanics. In confronting objects the artist must experience *original sensation*; the

\* See the two portraits of the "Fornarina," in the Sciarra and the Borghese palaces.



character of an object strikes him, and the effect of this sensation is a strong, peculiar impression. In other words, when a man is born with talent his perceptions—or at least a certain class of perceptions—are delicate and quick; he naturally seizes and distinguishes, with a sure and watchful tact, relationships and shades; at one time the plaintive or heroic sense in a sequence of sounds, at another the listlessness or stateliness of an attitude, and again the richness or sobriety of two complimentary or contiguous colors. Through this faculty he penetrates to the very heart of things, and seems to be more clear-sighted than other men. This sensation, moreover, so keen and so personal, is not inactive—by a counter-stroke the whole nervous and thinking machinery is affected by it. Man involuntarily expresses his emotions; the body makes signs, its attitude becomes mimetic; he is obliged to figure externally his conception of an object; the voice seeks imitative inflections, the tongue finds pictorial terms, unforeseen forms, a figurative, inventive, exaggerated style. Under the force of



the original impulse the active brain recasts and transforms the object, now to illumine and ennoble it, now to distort and grotesquely pervert it; in the free sketch, as in the violent caricature, you readily detect, with poetic temperaments, the ascendancy of involuntary impressions. Familiarize yourselves with the great artists and great authors of your century; study the sketches, designs, diaries, and correspondence of the old masters, and you will again everywhere find the same inward process. We may adorn it with beautiful names; we may call it genius or inspiration, which is right and proper; but if you wish to define it precisely you must always verify therein the vivid spontaneous sensation which groups together the train of accessory ideas, master, fashion, metamorphose and employ them in order to become manifest.

We have now arrived at a definition of a work of art. Let us, for a moment, cast our eyes backward, and review the road we have passed over. We have, by degrees, arrived at a conception of art more and more elevated, and consequently

more and more exact. At first we thought that the object of art was to *imitate sensible appearances*. Then separating material from intellectual imitation, we found that what it desired to reproduce in sensible appearances is the *relationships of parts*. Finally, remarking that relationships are, and ought to be, modified in order to obtain the highest results of art, we proved that if we study the relationships of parts it is to *make predominant an essential character*. No one of these definitions destroys its antecedent, but each corrects and defines it. We are consequently able now to combine them, and by subordinating the inferior to the superior, thus to sum up the result of our labor :—"The end of a work of art is to manifest some essential or salient character, consequently some important idea, clearer and more completely than is attainable from real objects. Art accomplishes this end by employing a group of connected parts, the relationships of which it systematically modifies. In the three *imitative arts* of sculpture, painting, and poetry, these groups correspond to real objects."

## VI.

THAT established, gentlemen, we see, on examining the different parts of this definition, that the first is essential and the second accessory. An aggregate of connected parts is necessary in all art which the artist may modify so as to portray character ; but in every art it is not necessary that this aggregate should correspond with real objects ; it is sufficient that it exists. If we therefore meet with aggregates of connected parts which are not imitations of real objects, there will be arts which will not have imitation for their point of view. This is the case, and it is thus that architecture and music are born. In short, besides connections, proportions, moral and organic dependencies, which the three imitative arts copy, there are mathematical relationships which the two others, imitating nothing, combine.

Let us, at first, consider the mathematical relationships perceived by the sense of sight.

Magnitudes sensible to the eye may form amongst each other aggregates of parts connected by mathematical laws. For instance, a piece of wood or stone may have geometrical form, that of a cube, a cone, a cylinder, or a sphere, which establishes regular relationships of distance between the different points of its outline. Furthermore, its dimensions may be quantities mutually related in simple proportions which the eye can seize readily; height may be two, three or four times greater than thickness or breadth: this constitutes a second series of mathematical relationships. Finally, many of these pieces of wood or stone may be placed symmetrically on the top or by the side of each other, according to distances and angles mathematically combined. Architecture is established on this aggregate of connected parts. An architect conceiving some dominant character, either serenity, simplicity, strength, or elegance, as formerly in Greece or Rome, or the strange, the varied, the infinite, the fantastic, as in Gothic times, may select and combine connections, proportions, dimensions, forms

and positions—in short, the relationships of materials, that is to say, certain visible magnitudes in such a way as to display the character aimed at.

By the side of magnitudes perceived by sight there are magnitudes perceived by the hearing,—I mean the velocities of sonorous vibrations; and these vibrations being magnitudes may also form aggregates of parts connected by mathematical laws. In the first place, as you are aware, a musical sound is composed of continuous vibrations of equal velocity, and this equality already places between them a mathematical relationship; in the second place, two sounds being given, the second may be composed of vibrations, two, three, or four times the rapidity of the first; accordingly, there is between these two sounds a mathematical relationship, which is figured by placing them at an equal distance from each other on the musical stave. If, consequently, instead of taking two, we take a number of sounds, and place them at equal distances, we form a scale, which scale is the gamut, all the sounds being

thus bound together according to their relative position on the gamut. You can now establish these connections either between successive or simultaneous sounds, the first order of sounds constituting melody, and the second harmony. This is music: it has two essential parts, based, like architecture, on mathematical relationships, which the artist is free to combine and modify.

Music, however, possesses a second property, and this new element gives it a peculiar quality and no ordinary scope. Besides its mathematical qualities, sound is analogous to the cry, and by this title it directly expresses with unrivaled precision, delicacy and force, suffering, joy, rage, indignation—all the agitations and emotions of an animated sensitive being, even to the most secret and most subtle gradations. From this point of view it is similar to poetic declamation, furnishing a specific type of music, called the music of expression, like that of Gluck and the Germans, in opposition to the music of melody, that of Rossini and the Italians. Let the composer's point of view be what it may, the two

styles of music are nevertheless related to each other, sounds always forming aggregates of parts linked together at once by their mathematical relationship and by the correspondence which they have with the passions and the various internal states of the moral being. The musician, therefore, who conceives a certain salient, important feature of things, let it be sadness or joy, tender love or passionate rage, any idea or sentiment whatever, may freely select and combine in such a way in these mathematical and moral relationships as to manifest the character which he has conceived.

All the arts are thus included in the definition above presented. In architecture and music, as in sculpture, painting, and poetry, it is the object of a work of art to manifest some essential character, and to employ as means of expression an aggregate of connected parts, the relationship of which the artist combines and modifies.

## VII.

Now that we know the nature of art, we can comprehend its importance. Previously we were only sensible of its effect ; it was a matter of instinct, and not of reason : we were conscious of respecting and esteeming art, but were not qualified to account for our respect and esteem. Our admiration for art can now be justified, and we can mark its place in the order of life.

Man, in many respects, is an animal endeavoring to protect himself against nature and against other men. He is obliged to provide himself with food, clothing, and shelter, and to defend himself against climate, want, and disease. To do this he tills the ground, navigates the sea, and devotes himself to different industrial and commercial pursuits. Furthermore, he must perpetuate his species, and secure himself against the violence of his fellow-men ; to this end, he forms families and states, and establishes magistracies,



functionaries, constitutions, laws, and armies. After so many inventions and such labor, he is not yet emancipated from his original condition ; he is still an animal, better fed and better protected than other animals ; he still thinks only of himself, and of his kindred. At this moment a superior life dawns on him—that of contemplation, by which he is led to interest himself in the creative and permanent causes on which his own being and that of his fellows depend, in the leading and essential characters which rule each aggregate, and impress their marks on the minutest details. Two ways are open to him for this purpose. The first is Science, by which, analyzing these causes and these fundamental laws, he expresses them in abstract terms and precise formula ; the second is Art, by which he manifests these causes and these fundamental laws no longer through arid definitions, inaccessible to the multitude, and only intelligible to a favored few, but in a sensible way, appealing not alone to reason, but also to the heart and senses of the humblest individual. Art has this peculiarity

that it is at once *noble* and *popular*, manifesting whatever is most exalted, and manifesting it to all.

**PART II.**  
**ON THE PRODUCTION OF THE WORK**  
**OF ART.**



## ON THE PRODUCTION OF THE WORK OF ART.

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### I.

HAVING investigated the nature of the work of art, there now remains a study of the law of its production. This law, in general terms, may be thus expressed :—*A work of art is determined by an aggregate which is the general state of the mind and surrounding circumstances.* I have stated this principle in the foregoing section, and have now to establish it.

This law rests on two kinds of proof: the one that of experience, and the other that of reason. The former consists of an enumeration of the many instances in which the law verifies itself. Some of these I have already presented to you, and others will soon follow. One may assert, moreover, that no case is known to which the

law is not applicable ; it is strictly so to those hitherto examined, and not merely in a general way, but in detail ; not only to the growth and extinction of great schools, but again to all the variations and oscillations to which art is subject. The second order of proof consists in showing this dependence to be not only rigorous in point of fact, but, again, that it is so through necessity. We will accordingly analyze what we have called the general state of the mind and surrounding circumstances ; we shall seek, according to the ordinary standard of human nature the effects which a like state must produce on the public, on artists, and consequently on works of art. Hence we draw a forced connection and a definite concordance, and we establish a necessary harmony which we had observed as simply fortuitous. The second proof *demonstrates* what the first had averred.

## II.

**In** order to make this harmony apparent let us resume a comparison already of service to us, that between a plant and a work of art, and note the circumstances in which a plant, or a species of plant, say the orange, may be developed and propagated in a certain soil. Let us suppose all kinds of grain and seed borne by the wind and sown at random ; on what conditions can those of the orange germinate, become trees, blossom, yield fruit, spread, and cover the ground with a numerous family ?

Many favorable circumstances are essential to this end. And at first the soil must be neither too light nor too meagre ; otherwise, the roots lacking depth and grasp, the tree would fall at the first gale of wind. Next, the soil must not be too dry ; otherwise the tree will wither where it stands, deprived of the moisture of springs and streams. Moreover, the climate must be warm

or the tree, which is delicate, will freeze, or at least droop, and never put forth sprouts; the summer must be long, in order that the fruit, which is slow in ripening, may fully mature; and the winter mild, so that January frosts may not blast or shrivel the oranges that remain green on its branches. Finally, the soil must not be too favorable for other plants, lest the tree, left to itself, might be stifled by the competition and infringement of a more vigorous vegetation. When all these conditions concur, the little orange will grow, become mature, and produce others again to reproduce themselves. Storms will undoubtedly occur, stones fall, and browsing goats will destroy certain plants; but on the whole, in spite of accidents which kill individuals, the species will be propagated, cover the ground, and in a few years display a flourishing grove of orange trees. All this is to be seen in the admirably sheltered gorges of Southern Italy, in the environs of Sorrento and Amalfi, on the shores of the gulfs, and in the small, watered valleys, freshened by streams descending from the mountains, and ca-



ressed by the beneficent breezes of the sea. This concourse of circumstances was necessary in order to produce those beautiful round tops, those lustrous domes of a bright deep green, those innumerable golden apples, and that exquisite fragrant vegetation which, in mid-winter, makes this coast the richest and loveliest of gardens.

Let us now reflect on the manner in which things moved in this example. We have just observed the effect of circumstances and of physical temperature. Strictly speaking, these have not produced the orange; the seeds were given, and these alone contained the vital force. The circumstances described, however, were necessary in order that the plant might flourish and be propagated; had these failed, the plant likewise would have failed.

Accordingly, let the temperature be different, and the species of plant will be different. Suppose conditions entirely opposite to those just mentioned; take the summit of a mountain swept by violent winds, with a thin scanty soil a cold climate, a short summer, and snow during the win

ter ; not only will the orange not thrive here, but the greater part of other trees will perish. Of all the seeds scattered haphazard by the wind only one will survive, and you will see but one species to endure and be propagated, the only one adapted to these severe conditions ; the fir and the pine will cover the lonely crags, the abrupt precipices, and long, rocky ridges, with their stiff colonnades of tall trunks and vast mantles of sombre green, and there, as in the Vosges, in Scotland and in Norway, you may travel league after league, under silent arches, on a carpet of crisp leaves, among gnarled roots obstinately clinging to the rocks, the domain of the patient, energetic plant which alone subsists under the incessant attacks of gales, and the hoar-frosts of long winters.

We may accordingly regard temperature and physical circumstances as *making a choice* amongst various species of trees, allowing a certain species to subsist and propagate, to the exclusion, more or less complete, of all others. Physical temperature acts by elimination and

suppression, in other words, by *natural selection*. Such is the great law by which we now explain the origin and structure of diverse existing organisms—a law as applicable to moral as to physical conditions, to history as well as to botany and zoölogy, to genius and to character, as well as to plant and to animal.

In short, there is a *moral* temperature, consisting of the general state of minds and manners, which acts in the same way as the other. Properly speaking, this temperature does not produce artists; talent and genius are gifts like seeds; what I mean to say is, that the same country at different epochs probably contains about the same number of men of talent, and of men of mediocrity. We know, in fact, through statistics, that in two successive generations nearly the same number of men are found of the requisite stature for the conscription and the same number of men too small for soldiers. In all probability, it is with minds as with bodies. Nature is a sower of men, and putting her hand constantly in the same sack, distributes nearly the same

quantity, the same quality, the same proportion of seed. But in these handfuls of seed which she scatters as she strides over time and space, not all germinate. A certain moral temperature is necessary to develop certain talents ; if this is wanting, these prove abortive. Consequently, as the temperature changes, so will the species of talent change ; if it becomes reversed, talent will become reversed, and, in general, we may conceive moral temperature as *making a selection* among different species of talent, allowing only this or that species to develop, to the exclusion more or less complete of others. It is through some such mechanism that you see developed in schools at certain times and in certain countries the sentiment of the ideal, that of the real, that of drawing and that of color. There is a prevailing tendency which constitutes the spirit of the age. Talent seeking to force an outlet in another direction, finds it closed ; and the force of the public mind and surrounding habits repress and lead it astray, by imposing on it a fixed growth.

### III.

THE foregoing comparison may serve you as a general indication ; let us now enter into details and study the action of the moral temperature on works of art.

For the sake of greater clearness we will take a very simple case, that of a certain mental condition, in which melancholy predominates. This supposition is not arbitrary, for such a condition has frequently occurred in the life of humanity : five or six centuries of decadence, depopulation, foreign invasion, famine, pests, and aggravated misery, are amply sufficient to produce it. Asia experienced such a state of things in the sixth century before Christ, and Europe in the period of the first ten centuries of our own era. In times like these men lose both courage and hope, and regard life as a burden.

Let us contemplate the effect of such a mental condition, together with the circumstances which

engender it, on the artists of an epoch like this. We admit that nearly the same number of melancholy and joyous temperaments, as well as a mixture of both, are met in this as at other times ; how and in what sense does the prevailing situation effect their transformation ?

It must be borne in mind that the misfortunes that afflict the public also afflict the artist ; he is one of the flock, and he suffers as the rest suffer. For example, if invasions of barbarians occur, and pests, famines, and calamities of all sorts prolonged for centuries and spread over the entire country ; not only one, but countless miracles, would be necessary to save him harmless in the general inundation. On the contrary, it is probable, and even certain, that he will have his share of public misfortune ; that he will be ruined, beaten, wounded, and led into captivity like others ; that his wife, children, relatives and friends will share the common fate, and that he will suffer and be subject to fears on their account, as well as on his own. During this long-continued flood of personal misery he will, if he is gay, become

less gay, and, if melancholy, still more melancholy. This is the first effect of his social medium.

On the other hand, if the artist is raised among melancholy companions, the ideas he receives in infancy, with those acquired afterwards, are melancholy. The dominant religion, accommodating itself to the lugubrious order of things, teaches him that the earth is a place of exile, the world a prison-house, life an evil, and that all that concerns him is to deserve to get out of it. Philosophy, forming its morality according to the lamentable spectacle of man's degeneracy, proves to him that it would have been better for him not to have been born. Ordinary conversation teems with only mournful events, the invasion of a province, the destruction of some monument, the oppression of the weak, and civil wars among the strong. Daily observation reveals to him only images of discouragement and grief, beggars, and cases of starvation, a bridge left to decay, abandoned, crumbling houses, fields going to waste, and the black walls of dwellings ravaged by fire.

All these impressions sink deep in his mind from the first year of his life to the last, incessantly aggravating whatever melancholy sentiment arises out of his own misfortunes.

They aggravate him so much the more proportionately to the intensity of his artistic feeling. What makes him an artist is the practice of imitating the essential character of things, the salient points of objects ; other men only see portions, while he sees the whole and the spirit of them. And as in this case the salient characteristic is melancholy, he accordingly perceives nothing else. Moreover, through this excess of imagination and this instinct of exaggeration peculiar to artists, he amplifies and expands it to the utmost ; he becomes impregnated with it, and charges his work with it, so that he commonly sees and paints things in much darker colors than would be employed by his contemporaries.

It must be added also that he finds them of great assistance to him in his work. You know that a man who paints or writes remains not alone face to face with his canvas or his writing-



desk On the contrary, he goes out and talks to people and looks about him; he listens to the hints of his friends or rivals, and seeks suggestions in books and from surrounding works of art. An idea resembles a seed: if the seed requires, in order to germinate, develop and bloom, the nourishment which water, air, sun and soil afford it, the idea, in order to complete and shape itself into form, requires to be supplemented and aided by other minds. Accordingly, in these epochs of melancholy, what sort of suggestions are other minds capable of furnishing? Only melancholy ones, for only on this side do men labor. As their experience provides them only with painful sensations and sentiments, they can only note the shades of difference, and record discoveries made on the path of suffering: the heart is the only field of observation, and if this is filled with sorrow, sorrow is all that men contemplate. They are, therefore, conscious only of grief, dejection, chagrin and despair. If the artist demands instruction of them this is all the return they can make. To seek in them any idea or any

information on the different kinds or different expressions of joy would be labor lost ; they can only furnish what they possess. For this reason let him attempt to portray happiness, cheerfulness, or gayety, and he stands alone, deprived of all support, left to his own resources, and which in an isolated man amounts to nothing. His labor will likewise be stamped with mediocrity. On the other hand, when he would paint melancholy sentiments his century would come to his aid. He finds materials prepared for him by preceding schools ; he finds a ready-made art, consisting of known processes and a beaten track. A church ceremony, a piece of furniture, a conversation, suggests to him a form, a color, a phrase, or a character still unknown to him ; his work, to which millions of unknown co-laborers have contributed, is all the more beautiful, because, in addition to his own labor and his own genius, it embodies the labor and genius of surrounding society, and of generations that have gone before it.

There is still another reason, and the strongest

of all, which draws him to melancholy subjects ; it is that his work, once exposed to the public eye, finds appreciation only as it expresses melancholy ideas. Men, indeed, can only comprehend sentiments analogous to those they have themselves experienced. Other sentiments, no matter how powerfully expressed, do not affect them ; they look with their eyes, but the heart is dormant and directly their eyes are averted. Imagine a man losing his fortune, country, children, health and liberty, one manacled in a dungeon for twenty years, like Pellico or Andryane, whose spirit by degrees is changed and broken, and who becomes melancholy and a mystic, and whose discouragement is incurable ; such a man entertains a horror of cheerful music, and has no disposition to read Rabelais ; if you place him before the merry brutes of Rubens, he will turn aside and place himself before the canvases of Rembrandt ; he will enjoy only the music of Chopin and the poetry of Lamartine or Heine. The same thing happens to the public and to individuals ; their taste depends on their situation ;

their sadness gives them a taste for melancholy works ; cheerful productions are accordingly repudiated, and the artist is censured or neglected. Now an artist composes mostly in order to obtain appreciation and applause ; this is his ruling passion. Hence, therefore, besides other causes, his ruling passion, added to the pressure of public opinion, leads him, pushes him, and constantly brings him back to the expression of melancholy, and barring the ways to him which would lead him to the portrayal of gayety and happiness.

Through this series of obstacles every passage would be closed for works of art manifesting joy. If an artist overcomes one obstacle, he is arrested by others. If he meets with joyous natures he will be saddened by their personal misfortunes. Education and current conversation fill their minds with gloomy ideas. The artists' faculties by which they detach and amplify the leading traits of objects, will find for their exercise none but melancholy ones. The experience and labor of others provide them with suggestions and are

co-operative only in melancholy subjects. Finally, the earnest and decisive will of the public allows them to produce only melancholy subjects. Consequently, the class of artists and their works suitable for the expression of gayety and joyousness disappear, or end by becoming reduced to almost nothing.

Consider, now, the opposite case, that of a general condition of cheerfulness. That occurs in renaissance epochs, when order, wealth, population, comfort, prosperity, and useful and beautiful discoveries are constantly increasing. By reversing its terms the analysis we have just made is applicable word for word; the same process of reasoning proves that the works of art of such a period will all, more or less, express a joyous character.

Consider, now, an intermediary case, that is to say, a commingling of this or that phase of joy or sadness, which is the ordinary condition of things. By a proper modification of terms, the analysis is equally pertinent; the same reasoning demonstrates that works of art express corre-

sponding combinations, and a corresponding species of joy and melancholy.

Let us conclude, therefore, that in every simple or complex state, the social medium, that is to say, the general state of mind and manners, determines the species of works of art in suffering only those which are in harmony with it, and in suppressing other species, through a series of obstacles interposed, and a series of attacks renewed, at every step of their development.

#### IV.

LET us now leave supposed cases, simplified to give clearness to the exposition, and take up real ones. You will see in glancing at the most important of a historical series, a verification of the law. I will select four which are the four great cycles of European civilization—Greek and Roman antiquity, the feudal and Christian middle ages, the well-regulated aristocratic monarchies of the seventeenth century, and the industrial democracies of the present day, directed by the sciences. Each of these periods has its own art, or some department of art peculiar to it, either sculpture, architecture, the drama or music, or some determined phase of each of these great arts; in every case a distinct, singularly rich and complete vegetation, which, in its leading features, reflects the principal traits of the art and the nation. Let us, accordingly, consider in turn the different soils, and we shall see that all produce different flowers.

## V.

ABOUT three thousand years ago there appeared on the shores and islands of the Ægean Sea a remarkably handsome, intelligent race, viewing life in quite a new way. It did not allow itself to be absorbed by a great religious conception like the Hindoos and Egyptians, nor by a great social organization like the Assyrians and Persians, nor by great industrial and commercial usages after the fashion of Phœnicians and Carthagenians. Instead of a theocracy and a hierarchy of caste, and instead of a monarchy and a hierarchy of functionaries and of great trading and commercial establishments, the men of that race had an invention of their own called the city, which city, in sending forth branches, gave birth to others of the same description. One of these, Miletus, produced three hundred towns, and colonized the entire coast of the Black Sea. Others did the same, the Mediterranean Sea be-



ing encircled with a garland of flourishing cities, extending from Cyrene to Marseilles, along the gulfs and promontories of Spain, Italy, Greece, Asia Minor and Africa.

What was the life of this city?\* A citizen performed but little manual labor; he was generally supported by his subjects and tributaries, and always served by slaves. The poorest man in the place had one to keep house for him. Athens counted four for each citizen; and lesser cities, like Ægina and Corinth, possessed from four to five hundred thousand. Servants, of course, abounded. The citizen, however, needed but little help. Like all the finely-built races of the south, he was abstemious, a meal consisting of three or four olives, a bit of garlic, and the head of a fish.† His wardrobe consisted of sandals, a small shirt, and a large mantle, like that of a shepherd. His house was a narrow, frail, ill-constructed tenement, into which robbers could

\* Grote, *History of Greece*—Boeckh, *Political Economy of the Athenians*—Wallon, *Slavery in Antiquity*.

† The Frogs of Aristophanes; the Cock of Lucian.

penetrate by piercing the walls,\* and which he only used for sleeping; a bed and two or three beautiful vases were the principal articles of furniture. The citizen had few wants, and he passed the day in the open air.

How did he dispose of his leisure? Serving neither king nor priest, he was, as far as he was concerned, free and sovereign in the city. He elected his own pontiffs and magistrates, and he himself, in turn, could be elected to sacerdotal and other offices; whether blacksmith or currier, he judged the most important political cases in the tribunals, and decided the gravest of affairs of state in the assemblies; his occupation consisted, substantially, of public business and war. To be a politician and a soldier was a part of his duty; other pursuits were of little importance to him; the attention of a free man, in his opinion, ought to be applied to these two employments. And he was right, for, at that time, human life was not protected as it is in ours; human societies had not acquired the stability which they now have

\* Their proper name was wall-piercers.

Most of these cities, built and scattered along the Mediterranean shores, were surrounded by barbarians eager to prey upon them ; the citizen was obliged to be under arms, like the European of the present day in Japan and in New Zealand ; if not, Gauls, Libyans, Samnites and Bithynians would soon have pitched their camps amid the ruins of battered walls and devastated temples. Besides all this, these cities were inimical to each other. The rights of war were atrocious ; a vanquished city was often devoted to destruction ; a wealthy noted man might any day see his dwelling in ashes, his property pillaged, his wife and daughters sold to recruit places of prostitution ; he himself, and his sons, enslaved, would be buried in mines, or compelled by the lash to turn a mill. With such perils before him it is natural for a man to be interested in affairs of state, and be qualified for battle ; he has to become a politician under penalty of death. Ambition, however, and love of glory are equal stimulants. Every city aspired to reduce or humble every other city, to acquire vassals, to conquer or to

make profitable the persons of others.\* The citizen passed his life in the public thoroughfares, discussing the best means for preserving and aggrandizing his city, canvassing its alliances, treaties, laws and constitution; now listening to orators, and again acting as one himself up to the very moment of going aboard his vessel in order to wage war in Thrace or in Egypt, against other Greeks, against the barbarians, or against the Great King.

To reach this point, they had systematized a peculiar discipline. As there were no industrial facilities in those days, the machinery of war was unknown. War was a combat between man and man; consequently, the essential thing to insure victory was not to transform soldiers into marshaled automaton, as in our day, but to render each soldier the most resistant, the strongest, and the most agile body possible; in short, a highly-tempered gladiator, capable of the utmost phys-

\* Thucydides, Book I. See the divers expeditions of the Athenians between the peace of Cimon and the Peloponnesian

ical endurance. To this end, Sparta which, about the eighth century, gave the example and the impulse to all Greece, had a very complicated and no less efficacious military system. She herself was a camp without walls, situated, like our camps in Kabyle, amidst enemies and a conquered people, wholly military, and devoted to attack and self-defense. In order to have a perfect military, it was necessary to have a splendid race; it was managed as in stock-breeding. All deformed children were deprived of life. The law, moreover, prescribed the age for marriage and selected the most suitable time and circumstances for proper breeding. An old man happening to have a young wife was obliged to give her over to a young man in order to have a good healthy offspring. A middle-aged man having a friend whose beauty and character he admired, might give him the use of his wife.\* After having constituted the race, they shaped the individual. Young men were enrolled, drilled, and accustomed to live in common like a troop of chil-

\* Xenophon. The Lacedemonian Republic, *passim*.

dren. They were divided into two rival bands, who inspected each other, and fought together with their feet and their fists. They slept in the open air, bathed in the cool waters of the Eurotas, went marauding, ate sparingly, fast and badly, rested on beds of rushes, drank nothing but water, and endured every inclemency of climate. Young girls exercised in the same manner, and the matured were restricted to almost the same routine. The rigor of this antique discipline was undoubtedly less, or was mitigated, in other cities; nevertheless, with these mitigations, the same road conducted to the same end. Young people passed the greater part of the day in the gymnasia, wrestling, jumping, boxing, racing, pitching quoits; fortifying and rendering supple their naked muscles. It was their aim to produce strong, robust bodies, the most beautiful and the nimblest possible, and no system of education ever succeeded better in obtaining them.\*

These peculiar customs of the Greeks gave birth to peculiar ideas. In their eyes the ideal

\* The Dialogues of Plato. The Clouds of Aristophanes.

man was not the man of thought, or a man of delicate sensibility, but the naked man, the man of a fine stock and growth, well-proportioned, active and accomplished in all physical exercises. This mode of thinking was manifested by a variety of traits. In the first place, whilst the Carians and the Lydians around them, and their barbarian neighbors generally, were ashamed to appear naked, they stripped without embarrassment in order to wrestle and run races.\* The young girls of Sparta were in the habit of exercising almost naked. You will perceive that gymnastic exercises had suppressed, or at least transformed, modesty. In the second place, the great national festivals of the Greeks, the Olympian, Pythian, and Nemean games, consisted of a display and triumph of the naked figure. The youth of the first families resorted to these from all parts of Greece, and from the remotest Grecian colonies. They prepared themselves for them a long time beforehand by special training

\* The Lacedemonians adopted this custom about the 14th Olympiad.—Plato.

and the severest labor, and there, under the eyes and applause of the whole nation, stripped of their clothing, they wrestled, boxed, pitched quoits, and raced on foot or in the chariot. Victories of this class, which we of the present day leave to a Hercules in a circus, they regarded as of the first importance. The victorious athlete in the foot-race gave his name to the Olympiad; his praises were chanted by the greatest poets. Pindar, the most illustrious lyric poet of antiquity, sang only of chariot races. On returning to his native city the victorious athlete was received in triumph, and his strength and agility became the pride of the place. One of these, Milo of Crotona, who was invincible at wrestling, was chosen general, and led his fellow-citizens to battle, clad in a lion's skin and armed with a club like Hercules, to whom he was compared. It is related that a certain Diagoras saw his two sons crowned on the same day, and was carried around by them in triumph before the assembled multitude. Deeming a like happiness too great for one mortal, the people cried out to him, "Dia



Diagoras, for thou canst not now become a god!" Diagoras, suffocated with emotion, did indeed expire in the arms of his children. In his eyes, as in the eyes of all Greece, to see his sons possessing the most vigorous fists and the nimblest legs was the height of terrestrial bliss. Whether this be truth or legend, such a judgment proves the excessive degree of admiration entertained by the Greeks for the perfection of the human form.

On this account they were not afraid to expose it before the gods on solemn occasions. They had a formal system of attitudes and actions, called *orchestrique*, which regulated and taught them beautiful postures of the sacred dances. After the battle of Salamis the tragic poet Sophocles, then fifteen years old, and celebrated for his beauty, stripped himself of his clothing in order to dance and chant the pæan before the trophy. One hundred years later, Alexander, on passing through Asia Minor to contend with Darius, cast aside his garments, along with his companions, for the purpose of honoring the tomb of Achilles with races. But the Greeks went still

further; they considered the perfection of the human form as attesting divinity. In a town in Sicily a young man of extraordinary beauty was worshiped, and after death, altars were erected in his honor.\* In Homer, which is the Grecian Bible, you will find everywhere that the gods had a human body which the flesh-lance could pierce, flowing red blood, instincts, passions and pleasures similar in every respect to our own, and to such an extent that heroes become the lovers of goddesses, and gods beget children of mortal mothers. Between Olympus and the earth there is no abyss; they descend from, and we ascend to, it; if they surpass us, it is because they are exempt from death, because their wounds heal quicker, and they are stronger, handsomer and happier than we. In other respects, they eat, drink and quarrel as we do, all enjoying the same senses, and employing the same corporeal functions. Greece has so well worked out its model of the beautiful human animal that it has made its idol of it, and glori-

\* Herodotus.

lies it on earth, by making a divinity of it in heaven.

Out of this conception statuary is born, and we can mark every moment of its growth. On the one hand, an athlete, once crowned, was entitled to a statue; crowned a third time, he was awarded an iconical statue—that is to say, an effigy bearing his portrait. On the other hand, the gods being only human forms, more serene and more perfect than others, it was natural to represent them by statues. For that purpose there is no need of a forced dogma. The marble or bronze effigy is not an allegory, but an exact image; it does not give to the god muscles, bones, and a heavy covering which it has not; it represents the re-clothing of flesh which covers it, and the living form which is its substance. It suffices, in order to be a truthful portrait, that it should be the most beautiful, and reproduce the immortal calm by which the god is exalted above mortals.

The statue is now blocked out—is the sculptor qualified to produce it? Dwell a moment on his preparation. Men in those days studied the

body naked and in action, in the baths, in the gymnasia, in the sacred dances and at the public games ; they observed and preferred such forms and such attitudes as denoted vigor, health, and activity ; they labored with all their might to impress on it these forms and to shape it to these attitudes. For three or four hundred years they were thus correcting, purifying, developing their idea of physical beauty. It is not surprising that they finally discovered the ideal type of the human form. We of the present day that are familiar with it owe our knowledge of it to them. When Nicholas of Pisa and other early sculptors at the end of the Gothic period abandoned the meagre, bony, and ugly forms of hieratic tradition, it was because they took an example from Greek bas-reliefs, preserved or exhumed ; and if to-day, forgetting our distorted and defective bodies, as plebeians or thinkers, we wish to find again some type of the perfect form, it is in these statues, monuments of a noble, unoccupied, gymnastic life, that we must seek our instruction.

Not only the form of it is perfect, but again,

which is unique, it suffices for the thought of the artist. The Greeks, having assigned to the body a dignity of its own, were not tempted, like the moderns, to subordinate it to the head. A chest breathing healthily, a trunk solidly resting on the thighs, a nervous supple leg impelling the body forward with ease; they did not occupy themselves solely with the breadth of a thoughtful forehead, with the frown of an irritated brow, or the turn of a sarcastic lip. They could limit themselves to the conditions of perfect statuary, which leaves the eye without an iris, and the head without expression; which prefers quiet personages, or those occupied by insignificant action; which commonly employs only a uniform tint, either of marble or of bronze; which leaves the picturesque to painting, and abandons dramatic interest to literature; which, confined to, but ennobled by, the nature of its materials and its limited domain, avoids the representation of details, of physiognomy, of the casualties of human agitation, in order to detach the pure and abstract form, and thus illuminate the sanctuaries with

motionless, peaceful, august effigies in which human nature recognized its heroes and its gods.

Statuary, accordingly, is the central art of Greece; other arts are related to it, accompany it, or imitate it. No other art has so well expressed the national life; no other was so cultivated or so popular. In the hundred small temples around Delphi, in which the treasures of the cities were kept, "a whole world of marble, gold, silver, brass, and bronze, twenty different bronzes, and of all tints, thousands of glorified dead in irregular groups, seated and standing, radiated the veritable subjects of the god of light." \* When Rome, at a later day, despoiled the Greek world of its treasures, this vast city possessed a population of statues almost equal to that of its living inhabitants. At the present time, after so many centuries and such devastation, it is estimated that more than sixty thousand statues have been discovered at Rome and in its surrounding Campagna. A like harvest of sculpture has never been seen, such a prodigious abundance of flow-

\* Michelet.

ers,—a display of flowers so perfect, a growth so natural, so continuous and varied. You have just seen the cause of it, in digging up the earth layer by layer, and in observing that all the foundations of the human soil, institutions, manners, ideas, have contributed to sustain it.

## VI.

**THIS** military organization common to all the cities of antiquity at length had its effect,—a sad effect. War being the natural condition of things, the weak were overpowered by the strong, and, more than once, one might have seen formed states of considerable magnitude under the control or tyranny of a victorious or dominant city. Finally one arose, Rome, which, possessing greater energy, patience, and skill, more capable of subordination and command, of consecutive views and practical calculations, attained, after seven hundred years of effort, in incorporating under her dominion the entire basin of the Mediterranean and many great outlying countries. To gain this point she submitted to military discipline, and, like a fruit springing from its germ, a military despotism was the issue. Thus was the Empire formed. Towards the first century of our era, the world, organized under a regular



monarchy, seemed at last to have attained to order and tranquillity. It issued only in a decline. In the horrible destruction of conquest cities perished by hundreds and men by millions. During an entire century the conquerors themselves massacred each other, and the civilized world having lost its free men, lost the half of its inhabitants.\* Citizens, converted into subjects, and no longer pursuing noble ends, abandoned themselves to indolence and luxury, refused to marry and to have children. Machinery being unknown, and the hand the only instrument of labor, the slaves, whose lot it was to provide for the pleasures, pomp, and refinements of society, disappeared under a burden too heavy for them to bear. At the expiration of four hundred years the enervated, depopulated empire had not sufficient men or energy to repel the barbarians. The barbarous wave entered, sweeping away the dykes; after the first, a second, then a third, and so on for a period of five hundred years. The evils they inflicted cannot be described: people

\* *Rome, thirty years B. C.*, by Victor Duruy.

exterminated, monuments destroyed, fields devastated, and cities burnt; industry, the fine arts, and the sciences mutilated, degraded, forgotten; fear, ignorance, and brutality spread everywhere and established. They were complete savages, similar to the Hurons and Iroquois suddenly encamped in the midst of a cultivated and thinking world like ours. Imagine a herd of wild bulls let loose amid the furniture and decorations of a palace, and after this another herd, so that the ruins left by the first perished under the hoofs of the second, and, scarcely installed in disorder, each troop of brutes had to arouse itself in order to battle with its horns a bellowing, insatiable troop of invaders. When at last, in the tenth century, the last horde had made its lair and glutted itself, men seemed to be in no better condition. The barbarian chiefs becoming feudal barons, fought amongst themselves, pillaging peasants and burning their crops, robbing the merchants, and wantonly robbing and maltreating their miserable serfs. The land remained waste, and provisions became scarce. In the

eleventh century forty out of seventy years were years of famine. A monk, Raoul Glaber, relates that it got to be common to eat human flesh ; a butcher was burnt alive for exposing it for sale in his stall. Add to this universal poverty and filth, and a total neglect of the simplest of hygienic principles, and you can well understand how leprosy, pests, and epidemics, becoming acclimated, raged as if upon their native soil. People degenerated to the condition of the anthropophagi of New Zealand, to the ignoble brutality of the Papuans and Caledonians, to the lowest depths of the human cesspool, seeing that reminiscences of the past trenched on the misery of the present, and since some thinking heads, still reading the ancient language felt in a confused way the immensity of the fall, the whole depth of the abyss into which the human species had been engulfed for a thousand years.

You may divine the sentiments which such a condition of things, so extreme and so lasting, implanted in people's breasts. At first there was weakness, disgust of life, and the deepest melan-

choly ; “the world,” said a writer of that day, “is nothing but an abyss of vice and immodesty.” Life seemed a foretaste of hell. Many withdrew from it, and not alone the poor, the feeble, and women, but sovereign lords, and even kings ; such as possessed delicate and noble natures preferred the tranquility and monotony of the cloister. On the approach of the year one thousand a general belief in the extinction of the world prevailed, and many, seized with fright, made over their property to churches and convents. On the other hand, and coupled with this terror and despondency, there arose an extraordinary degree of nervous exaltation. When men are very miserable they become excitable, like invalids and prisoners ; their sensibility increases, and acquires a feminine delicacy ; their heart is filled with caprices, agitations and despondency, excesses and effusions from which they are free in a healthy state. They depart from moderate sentiments which alone can maintain continuous masculine action. They indulge in reverie, burst into tears, sink down on their knees, become in-

capable of providing for themselves, imagine infinite sweet and tender transports, yearning to diffuse the excessive refinements and enthusiasm of their overwrought intemperate imaginations, in short, they are prone to love. Hence, we see them developed with an enormous exaggeration, a passion unknown to the stern and virile souls of antiquity, namely, the chivalric mystic love of the middle ages. The calm rational love of wedlock was subordinated to the ecstatic and unruly love encountered outside of wedlock. Its subtleties were carefully defined and embodied in the maxims of tribunals presided over by ladies. It was decreed there that "love could not exist between spouses," and that "love could refuse nothing to love."\* Woman was no longer considered as flesh and blood like man, but was converted into a divinity; a man was only too well compensated in the privilege of adoring and serving her. Human love was regarded as a celestial sentiment leading to divine love and confounded with it. Poets transformed their mistresses into

\* André le Chapelain.

supernatural virtue, and implored them to guide them through the empyrean to the tabernacle of God. You can easily appreciate the hold the Christian faith derived from such sentiments. Disgust for the world, a tendency to ecstasy, habitual despair and infinite craving for tender sympathy, naturally impelled men to a doctrine representing the earth as a vale of tears, the present life a period of trial, rapturous union with the Divinity as supreme happiness, and the love of God as the first of duties. Morbid or trembling sensibility found its support in the infinitude of terror and of hope, in pictures of flaming pits and eternal perdition, and in conceptions of a radiant paradise and of ineffable bliss. Thus supported, Christianity ruled all souls, inspired art, and gave employment to artists. "Society," says a contemporary, "divested itself of its old rags in order to clothe its churches in robes of whiteness." Gothic architecture accordingly made its appearance.

Let us observe the growth of the new Gothic edifice. In opposition to the religions of antiq-

nity, which were all local, belonging to castes or to families, Christianity is a universal religion which appeals to the multitude, and summons all men to salvation. It was necessary accordingly for this new edifice to be very large and capable of containing the entire population of any one city or district—the women, the children, the serfs, the artisans, and the poor as well as the nobles and sovereigns. The small *cella* which contains the statue of the Greek god, and the portico where the procession of free citizens was displayed, were not sufficient for this immense crowd. An enormous vault was required, lofty naves multiplied and crossed by others, and measureless arches and colossal columns; generations of workmen flocked in crowds for centuries to labor here for the salvation of their souls, displacing mountains before the monument could be completed.

The men who enter here have sorrowing souls, and the ideas they come in quest of are mournful. They meditate on this miserable life, so troubled and confined by such an abyss, on hell and its

punishments, endless, measureless and unintermittent, on the sufferings and passion of Christ crucified, and those of persecuted and tortured saints and martyrs. Listening to such religious teaching, and under the burden of their own fears, they could ill accommodate themselves to the simple beauty and joyous effect of pure light; the clear and healthy light of day is accordingly excluded; the interior of the edifice remains subject to cold and lugubrious shadow; light only comes in transformed by stained glass into purple and crimson tints, into the splendors of topaz and amethyst, into the mystic gleams of precious stones, into strange illuminations, seeming to afford glimpses of paradise.

Delicate over-excited imaginations like these are not content with simple architectural forms. And first, form in itself is not sufficient to interest them. It must be a symbol of and designate some august mystery. The edifice with its transverse naves represents the cross on which Christ died; its circular window with its brilliant petals figures the rose of eternity, the leaves of which



are redeemed souls; all the dimensions of its parts correspond to sacred numbers. Again, these forms in their richness, strangeness, boldness, delicacy and immensity, harmonize with the intemperance and curiosity of a morbid fancy. Vivid sensations—manifold, changing, bizarre and extreme—are necessary to such souls. They reject the column, the horizontal and transverse beams, the round arch, in short, the solid construction, balanced proportions, and beautiful simplicity of antique architecture; they do not sympathize with those noble creations that seem to have been born without pain and to last without effort, which attain to beauty the same time as to life, and the finished excellence of which needs neither addition nor ornament.

They adopt for type, not the plain half-circle of the arcade, or the simple angle formed by the column and the architrave, but the complicated union of two curves intersected by each other, forming the ogive. They aspire to the gigantic, covering square acres of ground with piles of stone, binding pillars together in monstrous col-

umns, suspending galleries in the air, elevating arches to the skies, and stage upon stage of belfry until their spires are lost in the clouds. They exaggerate the delicacy of forms; they surround doors with series of statuettes, and festoon the sides with trefoils, gables and gargoyles; they interlace the tortuous tracery of mullions with the motley hues of stained glass; the choir seems to be embroidered with lace, while tombs, altars, stalls and towers are covered with mazes of slender columns and fringes of leaves and statues. It seems as if they wished to attain at once infinite grandeur and infinite littleness, seeking to overwhelm the mind on either side, on the one hand with the vastness of a mass, and on the other with a prodigious quantity of details. Their object was evidently to produce an extraordinary sensation; they aimed to dazzle and bewilder.

Proportionately, therefore, to the development of this style of architecture, it becomes more and more paradoxical. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the age of the flamboyant Gothic of

Strasburg, Milan, York, Nuremburg, and the Church of Brou, solidity seems to have been wholly abandoned for ornament. At one time it bristles with a profusion of multiplied and superposed pinnacles; at another its exterior is draped with a lacework of mouldings. Walls are hollowed out, and almost wholly absorbed by windows; they lack strength, and without the buttresses raised against them the structure would fall; ever disintegrating, it is necessary to establish colonies of masons about them constantly to repair their constant decay. This embroidered stonework, more and more frail as it ascends the spire, cannot sustain itself; it has to be fastened to a skeleton of iron, and as iron rusts, the blacksmith is summoned to contribute his share towards propping up this unstable, delusive magnificence. In the interior the decoration is so exuberant and complex, the groinings so richly display their thorny and tangled vegetation, and the stalls, pulpit, and railings, swarm with such intricate, tortuous, fantastic arabesques, that the church no longer seems to be a sacred

monument, but a rare example of the jeweler's art. It is a vast structure of variegated glass, a gigantic piece of filigree work, a festive decoration as elaborated as that of a queen or a bride; it is the adornment of a nervous, over-excited woman, similar to the extravagant costumes of the day, whose delicate and morbid poesy denotes by its excess the singular sentiments, the feverish, violent, and impotent aspiration peculiar to an age of knights and monks.

For this architecture, which has lasted four centuries, is not confined to one country or to one description of edifice; it is spread over all Europe, from Scotland to Sicily, and is employed in all civil and religious and public and private monuments. Not only do cathedrals and chapels bear its imprint, but fortresses, palaces, costumes, dwellings, furniture, and equipments. Its universality, accordingly, expresses and attests the great moral crisis, at once morbid and sublime, which, during the whole of the middle ages, exalted, and at the same time disordered, the human intellect.

## VII.

**HUMAN** institutions, like living bodies, are made and unmade by their own forces ; and their health passes away or their cure is effected by the sole effect of their nature and their situation. Among these feudal chiefs who ruled and plundered men in the middle ages one was found in each country, stronger, more politic, and better placed than others, who constituted himself conservator of public order ; sustained by public sentiment, he by degrees weakened and subdued, subordinated and rallied the others, and, organizing a systematic obedient administration, became under the name of king the head of the nation. Towards the fifteenth century, the barons, formerly his equals, were only his officers, and towards the seventeenth century they were simply his courtiers.

Note the significance of this term. A courtier is a member of the king's court ; that is to say, a

person charged with some function or domestic duty in the palace—either chamberlain, equerry, or gentleman of the antechamber—receiving a salary, and addressing his master with all the deference and ceremonial obsequiousness proper to such an employment. But this person is not a valet, as in oriental monarchies, for his ancestor, the grandfather of his grandfather, was the equal, the companion, the peer of the king; and on this account he himself belongs to a privileged class, that of noblemen. He does not serve his prince solely through personal interest; his devotion to him is a point of honor. The prince in his turn never neglects to treat him with consideration. Louis XIV. threw his cane out of the window in order not to be tempted to strike Lauzun, who had offended him. The courtier is honored by his master, and regarded as one of his society. He lives in familiarity with him, dances at his balls, dines at his table, rides in the same carriage, sits in the same chairs, and frequents the same *salon*. From such a basis court life arose; first in Italy and Spain, subsequently

in France, and afterwards in England, in Germany, and in the north of Europe. France was its centre, and Louis XIV. gave to it its principal *éclat*.

Let us study the effect of this new state of things on minds and characters. The king's *salon* is the first in the country, and is frequented by the most select society; the most admired personage, therefore, the accomplished man whom everybody accepts for a model, is the nobleman enjoying familiarity with his sovereign. This nobleman entertains generous sentiments; he believes himself of a superior race, and he says to himself, *noblesse oblige*. He is more sensitive than other men on the point of honor, and freely risks his life at the slightest insult. Under Louis XIII. four thousand noblemen were killed in duels. Contempt of danger, in the eyes of this nobleman, is the first obligation of a soul nobly born. The dandy, the wordling, so choice of his ribbons, so careful of his perruque, is ready to encamp in Flanders mud, and expose himself to bullets for hours together at Neer

winden. When Luxembourg announces that he is about to give battle, Versailles is deserted; all these young perfumed gallants hasten off to the army as if they were going to a ball. Finally, and through a remnant of the spirit of ancient feudalism, our nobleman regards the monarch as his natural legitimate chief: he knows he is bound to him, as the vassal formerly was to his suzerain, and at need will give him his blood, his property, and his life. Under Louis XVI. noble-men voluntarily placed themselves at the king's disposal, and on the 10th of August many were slain in his behalf.

But they are nevertheless courtiers, that is to say, men of the world, and in this respect perfectly polite. The King himself sets them an example. Louis XIV. even doffed his hat to a chambermaid, and the Memoirs of St. Simon mention a duke who saluted so frequently that he was obliged to cross the courts of Versailles bareheaded. The courtier, for the same reason, is accomplished in all that appertains to good breeding; language never fails him in difficult



circumstances ; he is a diplomat, master of himself, an adept in the art of disguising, concealing, flattering and managing others, never giving offense, and often pleasing. All these qualifications and these sentiments proceed from an aristocratic spirit refined by the usages of society ; they attain to perfection in this court and in this century. Anybody of the present time disposed to admire the choice flowers of this lost and delicate species need not look for them in our equalized, rude and mixed society, but must turn to the elegant, formal, monumental parterres in which they formerly flourished.

You can imagine that people so constituted must have chosen pleasures appropriate to their character. Their taste, indeed, like their persons, was noble ; for they were not only noble by birth, but also through their sentiments ; and correct because they were educated to practice and respect what was becoming to them. It was this taste which, in the seventeenth century, fashioned all their works of art—the serious, elevated, severe productions of Poussin and Lesueur, the

grave, pompous, elaborate architecture of Mansart and Perrault, and the stately, symmetrical gardens of Le Notre. You will find its traces in the furniture, costumes, house decoration, and carriages of the engravings and paintings of Perelle, Sebastian Leclerc, Rigaud, Nanteuil, and many others. Versailles, with its groups of well-bred gods, its symmetrical alleys, its mythological water-works, its large artificial basins, its trimmed and pruned trees modeled into architectural designs, is a masterpiece in this direction; all its edifices and parterres, everything belonging to it, was constructed for men solicitous about their dignity, and strict observers of the recognized standard of social propriety. But the imprint is still more visible in the literature of the epoch. Never in France or in Europe has the art of fine writing been carried to such perfection. The greatest of French authors, as you are aware, belong to this epoch—Bossuet, Pascal, La Fontaine, Molière, Corneille, Racine, La Rochefoucauld, Madame de Sévigné, Boileau, La Bruyère, Bourdaloue, and others. Great men

not only wrote well, but almost everybody; Courier asserted that a chambermaid of those days knew more about style than a modern academy. In fact, a good style at that time pervaded the air, people unconsciously inhaling it; it prevailed in correspondence and in conversation; the court taught it; it entered into the ways of people of the world. The man who aimed to be polished and correct in deportment, got to be so likewise in the attributes of language and of style. Among so many branches of literature there is one, tragedy, which reached a singular degree of perfection, and which more than all the rest furnishes at that time the most striking example of the concordance which links together man and his works, manners and the arts.

The general features of this tragedy first claim attention; they are all calculated to please noblemen and members of the court. The poet does not fail in the blandishment of truth, which by its nature is often crude; he allows no murders on the stage; he disguises brutality and repudiates violence, such as blows, butcheries, yells, and

groans, everything that might offend the senses of a spectator accustomed to moderation and the elegances of the *salon*. For the same reason he excludes disorder, never abandoning himself to the caprices of fancy and imagination like Shakespeare; his plan is regular, he admits no unforeseen incidents, no romantic poesy. He elaborates his scenes, explains entrances, graduates the interest of his piece, prepares the way for sudden turns of fortune, and skillfully anticipates and directs dénouements. Finally, he diffuses throughout the dialogue, like a uniform brilliant varnish, a studied versification composed of the choicest terms and the most harmonious rhymes. If we seek the costume of this drama in the engravings of the time we find heroes and princesses appearing in furbelows, embroideries, bootees, swords and plumes—a dress, in short, Greek in name, but French in taste and fashion; such as the king, the dauphin, and the princesses paraded in, to the music of violins, at the court performances of ballets.

Note, moreover, that all his personages are

courtiers, kings and queens, princes and princesses of royal blood, ambassadors, ministers, officers of the guard, *menins*,\* dependents and confidants. The associates of princes are not here, as in ancient Greek tragedy, slaves of the palace and nurses born under their master's roof, but ladies-in-waiting, equerries, and gentlemen of the antechamber, charged with certain duties in the royal household ; we readily detect this in their conversational ability, in their skill in flattery, in their perfect education, in their exquisite deportment, and in their monarchical sentiments as subjects and vassals. Their masters, like themselves, are French noblemen of the seventeenth century, proud and courteous, heroic in Corneille and noble in Racine ; they are gallants with the ladies, faithful to their name and race, capable of sacrificing their dearest interests and strongest affections to their honor, and incapable of uttering a word or an act which the most rigid courtesy would not authorize. Iphigenia, in Ra-

\* Foster-brother, school-companion, or other intimate of this class.

cine, delivered up by her father to her executioners, does not regret life, weeping like a girl, as in Euripides, but thinks it her duty to obey her father and her king without a murmur, and to die without shedding a tear, because she is a princess. Achilles, who in Homer stamps, still unappeased, on the body of the dying Hector, feeling like a lion or wolf, as if he would "eat the raw flesh" of his vanquished antagonist, is, in Racine, a Prince of Condé, at once brilliant and seductive, passionate concerning honor, devoted to the fair, impetuous, it is true, and irritable, but with the reserved vivacity of a young officer who, even when most excited, maintains good breeding and never stoops to brutality. All these characters are models of polite address, and show a knowledge of the world never at fault. Read, in Racine, the first dialogue of *Oreste* and *Pyrrhus*, and the whole of the part of *Acomat* and of *Ulysse*; nowhere is greater tact or oratorical dexterity apparent; nowhere more ingenious compliments and flatteries, exordiums so well poised, such a quick revelation, such an in-

genious adjustment, such a delicate insinuation of appropriate motives. The wildest and most impetuous lovers—*Hippolyte*, *Britannicus*, *Pyrrhus*, *Oreste*, and *Xiphares*—are accomplished cavaliers who turn a madrigal and bow with the utmost deference. However violent their passions may be, *Hermione*, *Andromaque*, *Roxane*, and *Bérénice*, preserve the tone of the best society. *Mithridate*, *Phèdre*, and *Athalie*, when expiring, express themselves in correct periods, for a prince has to be a prince to the last, and die in due form. This drama might be called a perfect picture of the fashionable world. Like Gothic architecture, it represents a positive complete side of the human mind, and this is why, like that, it has become so universal. It has been imported into, or imitated by, along with its accompanying taste, literature, and manners, every court of Europe—in England, after the restoration of the Stuarts; in Spain, on the advent of the Bourbons; and in Italy, Germany, and Russia, in the eighteenth century. We are warranted in saying that at this epoch France was the educator of Europe;

she was the source from which was derived all that was elegant and agreeable, whatever was proper in style, delicate in ideas, and perfect in the art of social intercourse. If a savage Muscovite, a dull German, a stolid Englishman, or any other uncivilized or half-civilized man of the North quit his brandy, pipe, and furs, his feudal or hunting or rural life, it was to French *salons* and to French books he betook himself, in order to acquire the arts of politeness, urbanity, and conversation.



## VIII.

THIS brilliant society did not last; it was its own development which caused its dissolution. The government being absolute, ended in becoming negligent and tyrannical; and, besides this, the king bestowed the best offices and the greatest favor only on such of the nobles of his court as enjoyed his intimacy. This appeared unjust to the *bourgeoisie* and to the people, who, having greatly increased in numbers, wealth and intelligence, felt their power augment in proportion to the growth of their discontent. The French Revolution was accordingly their work; and after ten years of trial they established a system of democracy and equality, in which, according to a fixed order of promotion, all civil employments were ordinarily accessible to everybody. The wars of the empire and the contagion of example gradually spread this system beyond the frontiers of France, and whatever may be local differences

and temporary delays, it is now evident that the tendency of the whole of Europe is to imitate it. The new construction of society, coupled with the invention of industrial machinery, and the great abatement of rudeness in manners and customs, has changed the condition as well as the character of man. Henceforth, man is exempt from arbitrary measures, and is protected by a good police. However lowly born, all careers are open to him ; an enormous increase of useful articles places within reach of the poorest conveniences and pleasures of which, two centuries ago, the rich were entirely ignorant. Again, the rigor of authority is mitigated, both in society and in the family ; a father is now the companion of his children, and the citizen has become the equal of the noble. Human life, in short, displays a lesser degree of misery, and a lighter degree of oppression.

But, as a counterpart of this, we see ambition and cupidity spreading their wings. Accustomed to comfort and luxuries, and obtaining here and there glimpses of happiness, man begins to regard

happiness and comfort as his due. The more he obtains, the more exacting he becomes, and the more his pretensions exceed his acquisitions. The practical sciences also having made great progress, and instruction being diffused, liberated thought abandons itself to all daring enterprises ; hence it happens that men, relinquishing the traditions which formerly regulated their beliefs, deem themselves capable, through intellect alone, of attaining to the highest truths. Questions of every kind are mooted, moral, political and religious ; men seek knowledge by groping their way in every direction. For fifty years past we behold this strange conflict of systems and sects, each tendering us new creeds and perfect theories of happiness.

Such a state of things has a wonderful effect on minds and ideas. The representative man, that is to say, the character who occupies the stage, and to whom the spectators award the most interest and sympathy, is the melancholy, ambitious dreamer--Réné, Faust, Werther and Manfred—a yearning heart, restless, wandering

and incurably miserable. And he is miserable for two reasons. In the first place he is over-sensitive, too easily affected by the lesser evils of life ; he has too great a craving for delicate and blissful sensations ; he is too much accustomed to comfort ; he has not had the semi-feudal and semi-rustic education of our ancestors ; he has not been roughly handled by his father, whipped at college, obliged to maintain respectful silence in the presence of great personages, and had his mental growth retarded by domestic discipline ; he has not been compelled, as in ancient times, to use his own arm and sword to protect himself, to travel on horseback, and to sleep in disagreeable lodgings. In the soft atmosphere of modern comfort and of sedentary habits, he has become delicate, nervous, excitable, and less capable of accommodating himself to the course of life which always exacts effort and imposes trouble.

On the other hand, he is skeptical. Society and religion both being disturbed—in the midst of a *pêle-mêle* of doctrines and an irruption of

new theories—his precocious judgment, too rapidly instructed, and too soon unbridled, precipitates him early and blindly off the beaten track made smooth for his fathers by habit, and which they have trodden, led on by tradition and governed by authority. All the barriers which served as guides to minds having fallen, he rushes forward into the vast, confusing field which is opened out before his eyes; impelled by almost superhuman ambition and curiosity he darts off in the pursuit of absolute truth and infinite happiness. Neither love, glory, knowledge nor power, as we find these in this world, can satisfy him; the intemperance of his desires, irritated by the incompleteness of his conquests and by the nothingness of his enjoyments, leaves him prostrate amid the ruins of his own nature, without his jaded, enfeebled, impotent imagination being able to represent to him the *beyond* which he covets, and the unknown *what* which he has not. This evil has been styled the great malady of the age. Forty years ago it was in full force, and under the apparent frigidity or

gloomy impassibility of the positive mind of the present day it still subsists.

I have not the time to show you the innumerable effects of a like state of mind on works of art. You may trace them in the great development of the lyrical, sentimental and philosophical poetry of France, Germany and England; again, in the corruption and enrichment of language and in the invention of new classes and of new characters in literature; in the style and sentiments of all the great modern writers, from Chateaubriand to Balzac, from Goethe to Heine, from Cowper to Byron, and from Alfieri to Leopardi. You will find analogous symptoms in the arts of design if you will observe their feverish, tortured and painfully archeological style, their aim at dramatic effect, psychological expression, and local fidelity; if you observe the confusion which has befogged the schools and injured their processes; if you pay attention to the countless gifted minds who, shaken by new emotions, have opened out new ways; if you analyze the profound sympathy for scenery which has given

birth to a complete and original landscape art. But there is another art, Music, which has suddenly reached an extraordinary development. This development is one of the salient characteristics of our epoch, and the dependence of this on the modern mind, the ties by which they are connected, I shall endeavor to point out to you.

This art was born, and necessarily, in two countries where people sing naturally, Italy and Germany. It was gestating for a century and a half in Italy, from Palestrina to Pergolesi, as formerly painting from Giotto to Massaccio, discovering processes and feeling its way in order to acquire its resources. At the commencement of the eighteenth century it suddenly burst forth, with Scarlatti, Marcello and Handel. This is a most remarkable epoch. Painting at this time ceased to flourish in Italy, and in the midst of political stagnation, voluptuous, effeminate customs prevailed, furnishing an assembly of sigisbés, Lindors and amorous ladies for the roulades and tender sentimental scenes of the opera. Grave, ponderous Germany, at that time the

latest in acquiring self-consciousness, now succeeds in displaying the severity and grandeur of its religious sentiment, its profound knowledge, and its vague melancholy instincts in the sacred music of Sebastian Bach, anticipating the evangelical epic of Klopstock. In the old and in the new nation the reign and expression of *sentiment* is beginning. Between the two, half-Germanic and half-Italian, is Austria, conciliating the two spirits, producing Haydn, Gluck and Mozart. Music now becomes cosmopolite and universal on the confines of that great mental convulsion of souls styled the French Revolution, as formerly painting under the impulse of the great intellectual revival known under the name of the Renaissance. We need not be astonished at the appearance of this new art, for it corresponds to the appearance of a new genius—that of the ruling, morbid, restless, ardent character I have attempted to portray for you. It is to this spirit that Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Weber formerly addressed themselves, and to which Meyerbeer, Berlioz and Verdi are now striving to accommodate themselves.



Music is the organ of this over-refined excessive sensibility and vague boundless aspiration ; it is expressly designed for this service, and no art so well performs its task. And this is so because, on the one hand, music is founded on a more or less remote imitation of a cry which is the natural, spontaneous, complete expression of passion, and which, affecting us through a corporeal stimulus, instantly arouses involuntary sympathy, so that the tremulous delicacy of every nervous being finds in it its impulse, its echo, and its ministrant. On the other hand, founded on relationships of sounds which represent no living form, and which, especially in instrumental music, seem to be the reveries of an incorporeal soul, it is better adapted than any other art to express floating thoughts, formless dreams, objectless limitless desires, the grandiose and dolorous mazes of a troubled heart which aspires to all and is attached to nothing. This is why, along with the discontent, the agitations, and the hopes of modern democracy, music has left its natal countries and diffused itself over all Europe ; and

why you see at the present time the most complicated symphonies attracting crowds in France, where, thus far, the national music has been reduced to the song and the melodies of the Vaudeville.

## IX.

THE foregoing illustrations, gentlemen, seem to me sufficient to establish the law governing the character and creation of works of art. And not only do they establish it, but they accurately define it. In the beginning of this section I stated that *the work of art is determined by an aggregate which is the general state of the mind and surrounding manners.* We may now advance another step, and note precisely in their order each link of the chain, connecting together cause and effect.

In the various illustrations we have considered, you have remarked first, a *general situation*, in other words, a certain universal condition of good or evil, one of servitude or of liberty, a state of wealth or of poverty, a particular form of society, a certain species of religious faith ; in Greece, the free martial city, with its slaves ; in the middle ages, feudal oppression, invasion and brigandage, and an exalted phase of Christianity ; the court

life of the seventeenth century ; the industrial and studied democracy of the nineteenth, guided by the sciences ; in short, a group of circumstances controlling man, and to which he is compelled to resign himself.

This situation develops in man corresponding needs, distinct *aptitudes* and *special sentiments*—physical activity, a tendency to reverie ; here rudeness, and there refinement ; at one time a martial instinct, at another conversational talent, at another a love of pleasure, and a thousand other complex and varied peculiarities. In Greece we see physical perfection and a balance of faculties which no manual or cerebral excess of life deranges ; in the middle ages, the intemperance of over-excited imaginations and the delicacy of feminine sensibility ; in the seventeenth century, the polish and good-breeding of society and the dignity of aristocratic *salons* ; and in modern times, the grandeur of unchained ambitions and the morbidity of unsatisfied yearnings.

Now, this group of sentiments, aptitude and needs, constitutes, when concentrated in one per-

son and powerfully displayed by him, *the representative man*, that is to say, a model character to whom his contemporaries award all their admiration and all their sympathy; there is, for instance, in Greece, the naked youth, of a fine race and accomplished in all bodily exercise; in the middle ages, the ecstatic monk and the amorous knight; in the seventeenth century, the perfect courtier; and in our days, the melancholy insatiable Faust or Werther.

Moreover, as this personage is the most captivating, the most important and the most conspicuous of all, it is he whom artists present to the public, now concentrated in an ideal personage, when their art, like painting, sculpture, the drama, the romance or the epic, is imitative; now, dispersed in its elements, as in architecture and in music, where art excites emotions without incarnating them. All their labor, therefore, may be summed up as follows: they either represent this character, or address themselves to it; the symphonies of Beethoven and the "storied windows" of cathedrals are addressed to it; and it is repre-

sented in the Niobe group of antiquity and in the Agamemnon and Achilles of Racine. *All art, therefore, depends on it*, since the whole of art is applied only to conform to, or to express it.

A general situation, provoking tendencies and special faculties; a representative man, embodying these predominant tendencies and faculties sounds, forms, colors, or language giving this character sensuous form, or which comport with the tendencies and faculties comprising it, such are the four terms of the series; the first carries with it the second, the second the third, and the third the fourth, so that the slightest variation of either involves a corresponding variation in those that follow, and reveals a corresponding variation in those that precede it, permitting abstract reasoning in either direction in an ascending or descending scale of progression.\* As far as I am capable of judging, this formula embraces everything. If, now, we insert between these diverse

\* This law may be applied to the study of all literatures and to every art. The student may begin with the fourth term, proceeding from this to the first, strictly adhering to the order of the series.

terms the accessory causes occurring to modify their effects if, in order to explain the sentiments of an epoch, we add an examination of race to that of the social medium ; if, in order to explain the works of art of any age, we consider, besides the prevailing tendencies of that age, the particular period of the art, and the particular sentiments of each artist, we shall then derive from the law not only the great revolutions and general forms of man's imagination, but, again, the differences between national schools, the incessant variations of various styles, and the original characteristics of the works of every great master. Thus followed out, such an explanation will be complete, since it furnishes at once the general traits of each school, and the distinctive traits which, in this school, characterize individuals. We are about to enter upon this study in relation to Italian art ; it is a long and difficult task, and I have need of your attention in order to pursue it to the end.

## X.

BEFORE proceeding further, gentlemen, there is a practical and personal conclusion due to our researches, and which is applicable to the present order of things.

You have observed that each situation produces a certain state of mind followed by a corresponding class of works of art. This is why every new situation must produce a new state of mind, and consequently a new class of works ; and therefore why the social medium of the present day, now in the course of formation, ought to produce its own works like the social mediums that have gone before it. This is not a simple supposition based on the current of desire and of hope ; it is the result of a law resting on the authority of experience and on the testimony of history. From the moment a law is established it is good for all time ; the connections of things in the present, accompany connections of



things in the past and in the future. Accordingly, it need not be said in these days that art is exhausted. It is true that certain schools no longer exist and can no longer be revived; that certain arts languish, and that the future upon which we are entering does not promise to furnish the aliment that these require. But art itself, which is the faculty of perceiving and expressing the leading character of objects, is as enduring as the civilization of which it is the best and earliest fruit. What its forms will be, and which of the five great arts will provide the vehicle of expression of future sentiment, we are not called upon to decide; we have the right to affirm that new forms will arise, and an appropriate mould be found in which to cast them. We have only to open our eyes to see a change going on in the condition of men, and consequently in their minds, so profound, so universal, and so rapid that no other century has witnessed the like of it. The three causes that have formed the modern mind continue to operate with increasing efficacy. You are all aware that discoveries in the positive

sciences are multiplying daily ; that geology, organic chemistry, history, entire branches of physics and zoölogy, are contemporary productions ; that the growth of experience is infinite, and the applications of discovery unlimited ; that means of communication and transport, cultivation, trade, mechanical contrivances, all the elements of human power, are yearly spreading and concentrating beyond all expectation. None of you are ignorant that the political machine works smoother in the same sense ; that communities, becoming more rational and humane, are watchful of internal order, protecting talent, aiding the feeble and the poor ; in short, that everywhere, and in every way, man is cultivating his intellectual faculties and ameliorating his social condition. We cannot accordingly deny that men's habits, ideas and condition transform themselves, nor reject this consequence, that such renewal of minds and things brings along with it a renewal of art. The first period of this evolution gave rise to the glorious French school of 1830 ; it remains for us to witness the second--the field

which is open to your ambition and your labor. On its very threshold, you have a right to augur well of your century and of yourselves; for the patient study we have just terminated shows you that to produce beautiful works, the sole condition necessary is that which the great Goethe indicated: "Fill your mind and heart, however large, with the ideas and sentiments of your age, and the work will follow."



# THE IDEAL IN ART

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## NOTICE.

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"THE IDEAL IN ART," forms the substance of two lectures, delivered during the past year to the students of the *École des Beaux-Arts*, in Paris, by M. TAINE, Professor of the History of Art in that institution. The subject is treated in accordance with the principles laid down by this distinguished writer in "The Philosophy of Art," the theory of which it may be said to complete.





DEDICATED  
TO  
M. SAINTE-BEUVE.



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# ON THE IDEAL IN ART.

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GENTLEMEN :

It seems as if the subject to which I am about to claim your attention could only be treated through poesy. In regard to the Ideal it is the heart which speaks ; we then think of the vague and beautiful dream by which is expressed the deepest sentiment ; we scarcely breathe it in the lowest voice, with a kind of subdued enthusiasm ; when we speak of it otherwise it is in verse, in a canticle ; we dwell on it reverentially, with clasped hands, as if it concerned happiness, heaven, or love. As to ourselves, we shall, as usual, study it as naturalists, that is, methodically, analytically, and shall endeavor to realize not an ode but a law.

At first we must understand this word the *Ideal*. The grammatical explanation of it is not difficult. Let me recall the definition of a work of art which we gave at the beginning of this course.\* On that occasion we said that the aim of a work of art was to make known some leading and important character more effectually and clearly than objects themselves do. For that purpose the artist forms for himself an idea of that character, and according to his idea he transforms the actual object. This object thus transformed is found to *conform to the idea*, or, in other words, to the *ideal*. Things thus pass from the real to the ideal when the artist reproduces them by modifying them according to his idea, and he modifies them according to his idea when, conceiving and eliminating from them some notable character, he systematically changes the natural relationships of their parts in order to render this character more apparent and powerful.

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\* See the Philosophy of Art, page 61.

## I.

Among the ideas which artists impart to their models are there any which take the lead of others? Can we point out any one character which is superior to all the others? Is there for each object an ideal form outside of which all is deviation or error? Can we discover a principle of subordination by which to assign rank to the diverse productions of art?

At the first glance we are tempted to say, no; the definition which we have given seems to bar the way to this investigation; it leads one to believe that all the works of art are on a level, and that the scope of art is an open question. In short, if the object becomes ideal in that it is alone conformable to the idea, the idea is of little consequence; the choice lies with the artist; he will choose this or that according to his taste; we shall have no claim on him. The same subject may be treated in this form or in another, or in all intermediate forms. Better

still, it seems that here history is in keeping with logic, and that theory is in conformity with the facts. Let us consider different centuries, different nations and different schools. Artists differing in race, in mind and in education, are differently impressed by the same object; each one sees it from his own point of view; each one perceives in it a distinct character; each one forms for himself an original idea of it, and this idea, manifested in the new work, immediately stands forth a new masterpiece in the gallery of ideal forms, like a new divinity in an Olympus heretofore regarded as complete.—Plautus places the poor miser Euclion on the stage; Molière takes up the same personage also, and places there the rich miser Harpagon. Two centuries later the miser, not stupid and taunted as formerly, but redoubtable and triumphant, becomes old Grandet in the hands of Balzac, and the same miser taken from the provinces and becoming Parisian, cosmopolite and a drawing-room poet, furnishes the same Balzac the usurer Gobseck.—One situation alone, that of a father

maltreated by his ungrateful children, suggested the *Œdipus* of Sophocles, Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Balzac's *Père Goriot*.—Every romance and every drama represents some young man and young woman in love with each other and anxious to be married; under how many different forms have this same couple been presented from Shakespeare to Dickens and from Madame de Lafayette to George Sand. The lovers, the father, the miser, all the great types can therefore be always reproduced; they have been so uninterruptedly and will still continue to be so, and it is truly the appropriate and sole glory, the hereditary necessity of true genius to create such characters outside of the conventional and traditional order of things.

If, after literary productions, we regard the arts of design, the right of selecting at will this or that character appears to be still better founded. A dozen or so of evangelical or mythological subjects or personages have been equal to the wants of high art; the arbitrary will of the artist declares itself here not only by a di-

versity of works, but by complete success. We dare not praise one more than another, we dare not place one perfect work above another, we dare not say that we should follow Rembrandt rather than Veronese, or Veronese rather than Rembrandt. And yet what a contrast! In the "Feast of Emmaus"\* the Christ of Rembrandt is a resuscitated, cadaverous, sallow, and dolorous figure, who has experienced the chill of the grave, and whose sad and benignant look fixes itself once more on human misery. Near to this figure are two disciples, old worn-out laborers with bald and blanched heads, seated at the table of a common inn, a little stable-boy looking on with a vacant air, while around the head of the revived Redeemer shines the peculiar radiance of the other world. In the "Christ of the Hundred Florins" the same idea reappears more vividly. This, indeed, is the Christ of the people, the Saviour of the poor,

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\* See this picture in the Louvre; the engraved sketch is somewhat different.

standing in one of those Flemish caverns, where the Lollards once prayed and wove; ragged mendicants and hospital outcasts extend toward him their suppliant hands: a coarse peasant-woman, kneeling, looks at him with the staring and fixed eyes of deep faith; a paralytic is brought stretched across a barrow—tattered clothes, old greasy mantles faded by exposure, scrofulous and deformed bodies, pale, wan, brutalized faces, a sorrowful mass of ugliness and disease, a sort of human sty which the favored of the age, fat citizens and a corpulent burgo-master, gaze on with insolent indifference, but over which the benignant Christ stretches His healing hands whilst His supernatural light penetrates the shadows, and radiates even to the dripping walls.—If poverty, sadness, and gloom, flecked with vague lights, have furnished masterpieces; wealth, mirth, and the warm and beaming light of open day furnish kindred masterpieces. Look at the three feasts of Christ by Veronese, at Venice and in the Louvre. The open sky expands above an architecture of balus

trades, colonnades, and statues ; glittering whiteness, and the surfaces of variegated marbles, frame an assemblage of lords and ladies enjoying a feast, a Venetian public banquet of the sixteenth century ; Christ sits in the centre, and in long rows around Him, nobles in silken pourpoints, princesses in brocade robes eat and laugh, while greyhounds, negroes, dwarfs, and musicians attract the eyes or the ears of the attendant company. Simarres, woven with black and silver, undulate by the side of velvet skirts embroidered with gold ; collars of lace encircle the satiny whiteness of necks ; pearls gleam on blonde tresses ; blooming carnations lead one to divine the force of youthful blood flowing easily and in full veins ; intelligent and vivacious faces are on the verge of a smile, while upon the silvery or rosy lustre of the general tint golden yellows, deep blues, intense scarlet, rayed greens and broken and uniform tones complete, in their elegant and exquisite harmony, the poesy of this aristocratic and voluptuous display.

On the other hand what is there better deter-



mined than the pagan Olympus? Greek statuary and literature have clearly defined all its contours; it seems that, in its place, every innovation was prohibited, every form fixed, and all invention circumscribed. And yet each painter, in transferring it to his canvas, makes a character predominate there hitherto unrecognized. The "Parnassus" of Raphael offers to the eye lovely young women of a sweetness and grace perfectly human; an Apollo who, with heavenward eyes, is lost in listening to the sound of his own lyre; a symmetrical architecture of chaste harmonious forms, modest nudities which the sober and almost dull tone of the fresco renders still more modest. With opposite characters Rubens repeats the same work. Nothing is less antique than his mythology. In his hands Greek divinities have become Flemish bodies with a sanguine and lymphatic pulpiness, and his celestial banquets resemble the masques which, at the same epoch, Ben Jonson arranged for the court of James I.: bold nudities doubly enhanced by the splendor of falling draperies;

fat, white Venuses holding captive their lovers with a courtesan's abandoned air; arch and sly Ceres in smiles; plump and palpitating backs of writhing sirens; mellow and extended inflexions of the pliant, living muscle; the fury of transport, the impetuosity of desire, the sumptuous display of an unbridled and conquering sensuality, which the temperament feeds, which is unchecked by conscience, which becomes poetic in remaining animal, and, through an unusual concurrence, merges in its pleasures all the immunities of nature and all the pomp of civilization.

The culminating point is here again reached; "lusty good humor" surrounds and pervades all; "the wings of this Flemish Titan were so strong that he rose upward to the sun, although quintals of Dutch cheese hung to his legs."\*—If, finally, instead of comparing two artists of a different race, you restrict yourselves to the same nation, revert to the Italian works that I

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\* Heine's *Reisebilder*, vol. i., p. 154.

have described to you, namely, the Crucifixions, the Nativities, the Annunciations, the Madonnas and Infants, the Jupiters, the Apollos, the Venuses and the Dianas ; and, in order to render your impressions clear, to the same scene treated by three masters, Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo, and Correggio. I refer to their "Ledas," the three engravings of which you are, at least, familiar with. The "Leda" of Da Vinci is erect, modest, the eyes downcast, and the sinuous, serpentine lines of her beautiful body undulate with a regal and subtle elegance ; with a conjugal turn, the swan, almost human, envelopes her with his wing, and the little pair nestling alongside of her have the oblique eye of that bird ; nowhere is the mystery of ancient days, the profound relation between man and animal, the vague pagan and philosophic sentiment of the unity and universality of life expressed with more accurate research, and disclosing the divinations of a more penetrating and comprehensive genius.—The "Leda" of Michael Angelo, on the contrary, is a queen of a colossal and mili-

tant race, a sister of those sublime virgins who slumber, exhausted, in the chapel of the Medici, or awake painfully to commence again the struggle of life; her large, elongated form has the same muscles and the same structure; her cheeks are sunken; there is not the faintest trace in her of joy or abandonment; even in a moment like this she is grave, almost sombre. The tragic soul of Michael Angelo puts motion into those athletic limbs, throws back that heroic torso, and renders rigid that fixed look beneath that frowning brow.—The age changes, and virile sentiments give place to feminine sentiments. With Correggio the scene becomes a bath of young girls under the soft green shade of the trees, and amidst the gentle flow of a rippling and murmuring stream. Every thing is both seductive and attractive; complete voluptuousness, the happy dream, the sweet grace, never expanded or moved the soul by a more penetrating and effective language. The beauty of form and of head is not noble, but lovely and endearing. Full and smiling, with the lustre of satin, with

The brilliancy of flowers lit up by the sun, the bloom of the most blooming youth enhances the delicate whiteness of their flesh impregnated with light. One, blonde, complacent, with the equivocal torso and hair of a youth, chases away the swan; another, arch and pretty, holds the chemise into which her companion enters, while the aërial tissue which lightly covers her scarcely veils the full contours of her lovely form; others, frolicsome, with low brows, large lips, and prominent chins, play in the water with an abandonment at once riotous and enticing. Still more abandoned, and content to be so, Leda smiles and yields; and thus the intoxicating exquisite sensation which is derived from the whole scene overflows in her ecstasy and transport.

Which is to be preferred? And which is the superior character, the charming grace of excessive happiness, the tragic grandeur of haughty energy, or the depth of intelligent and refined sympathy? All correspond to some essential portion of human nature, or to some essential moment of human development. Joy and sad-

ness, sound reason and mystic revery, active energy or refined sensibility, lofty aspirations of the restless intellect and the broad expansion of animal delight, all the important parts in the province of life have their value. Centuries and entire nations have been engaged in bringing them to light; what history has manifested art takes up, and, as the various natural creatures, whatever may be their structure and their instincts, find their place in the world and an explanation in science, so the various works of the human imagination, whatever may be the principle which animates them, and the direction which they manifest, find their justification in discriminating sympathy and their place in art.

## II.

And yet in the imaginary world as in the real world there are different degrees because there are different values. The public and connoisseurs determine some and estimate others. We have done nothing but this for three years in traversing five centuries of Italian painting. We have always, and at every step, pronounced judgment. Without knowing it we held a measuring instrument in our hands. Other men do as we do, and in criticism, as elsewhere, there are ascertained truths. Every man now recognizes that certain poets like Dante and Shakespeare, certain composers like Mozart and Beethoven occupy the highest places in their art. Among all the writers of our century this place is given to Goethe. Among the Flemings, every one awards it to Rubens; among the Dutch to Rembrandt; among the Germans to Albert Durer; among the Venetians to Titian. Three artists of the Italian renaissance, Leonardo da

Vinci, Michael Angelo and Raphael, rise, by unanimous consent, above all the rest.—Moreover, these definitive judgments which posterity pronounces are confirmed in their justice by the way in which they are rendered. In the first place the contemporaries of the artist unite to judge him, and this judgment, in which so many differing minds, temperaments, and educations have concurred, is important, because the inadequacy of each individual taste has been supplemented by the diversities of others' tastes; prejudices, coming in conflict with each other are balanced, and this continuous and mutual compensation gradually brings the final result nearer to the truth. This done, another century continues the work in a new vein, and then after this, another; each revises the litigated point, each doing it from his own point of view; all are so many profound rectifications and powerful combinations. When the work, after thus having passed from court to court issues from them, determined in the same manner, and the judges, stationed along the line of centuries



agree in the same verdict, the sentence, probably, is just; for, if the work were not superior, it would not have drawn together so many different sympathies in such a decision. If the limitation of mind peculiar to epochs and to nations leads them sometimes, like individuals, to judge and comprehend badly, here, as in the case of individuals, the aberrations being rectified and the deviations being annulled by each other, they tend gradually to that state of fixity and of rectitude, in which opinion is found so well and legitimately established, that we may adhere to it with confidence and with reason. In addition, in fine, to this conformity of instinctive tastes the modern processes of criticism come to add the authority of science to that of common sense. A critic is now aware that his personal taste has no value, that he must set aside his temperament, inclinations, party, and interests; that, above all, his talent lies in sympathy, that his first essay in history should consist in putting himself in the place of the men whom he is desirous of judging, to enter into

their instincts and habits, to espouse their sentiments, to re-think their thoughts, to reproduce within himself their inward condition, to represent to himself minutely and substantially their surroundings, to follow in imagination the circumstances and the impressions which, added to their innate tendency, have determined their actions and guided their lives. Such a course, in placing us at an artistic point of view, permits us better to comprehend them; and as it is composed of analysis, it is, like every scientific operation, capable of verification and perfectibility. By following this method we have been able to approve and disapprove of this or that artist, to condemn one and praise another part of the same work, to determine the nature of values, to point out progress or decline, to recognize periods of bloom and decay, not arbitrarily, but according to a common criterion. It is this hidden criterion that I am going to try to disclose, to define, and to demonstrate to you.

## III.

Let us consider, to this end, the various parts of the definition which we have given. To give full prominence to a leading character is the object of a work of art. It is owing to this that the closer a work of art approaches this point the more perfect it becomes ; in other words the more exactly and completely these conditions are complied with the more elevated it becomes on the scale. Two of these conditions are necessary ; it is necessary that the character should be the most notable possible and the most dominant possible. Let us study closely these two artistic obligations. In order to abridge our labor I will examine only the arts of imitation, sculpture, dramatic music, painting and literature, and principally the two last. That will suffice ; for you know the link which binds together the arts that imitate and the arts that do not imitate.\* Both seek to render dominant some notable character. Both succeed by employing an

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\* See the Philosophy of Art, chap. v. p. 62.

*ensemble* of connected parts, the relationships of which they combine or modify. The only difference is that the arts of imitation, painting, sculpture, and poesy, reproduce organic and moral connections and form works corresponding to real objects, whilst the other arts, music properly so called and architecture, combine mathematical relationships so as to create works that do not correspond to real objects. But a symphony, a temple thus constituted are living beings like a written poem or a painted figure; for they are also organized beings, all the parts of which are mutually dependent and governed by a guiding principle; they also possess a physiognomy, they also manifest an intention, they also speak through expression, they also terminate in an effect. Under all these headings they are ideal creations of the same order as the others, subjected to the same laws of formation as to the same rules of criticism; they are only a distinct group in the entire class, and, with a restriction known by anticipation, the truths which are alongside of them are applied to them.

## § 1.

THE DEGREE OF IMPORTANCE OF THE  
CHARACTER.



## I.

What, then, is a notable character, and how at first, can we know, two characters being given, if one is more important than the other? We find ourselves carried back by this question into the domain of science; for the question here is of beings in themselves, and it rightly belongs to the sciences to take account of the characters composing this class of beings. We are obliged to make an excursion into natural history; I will not apologize to you for so doing; if the matter seems, at first, to be dry and abstract let us overlook it. The relationship existing between art and science is as honorable for the one as for the other; it is the glory of the latter to give to beauty its principal adjuncts; it is the glory of the former to base its noblest structures on the truth.

It is about a hundred years since the natural sciences discovered the law of valuation which we are about to borrow from them; namely, the

*principle of the subordination of characters*; all the classifications of botany and of zoölogy have been constructed according to it, and its importance has been demonstrated by discoveries as unexpected as profound. In a plant, and in an animal, certain characters have been recognized as more important than others; these are the *least variable* characters. In this respect they possess a force greater than that of others, for they better bear up against the attack in every circumstance, internal or external, which might undo or vary them. For example, in a plant, shape and size are less important than structure; for, inwardly, certain accessory characters, and, outwardly, certain accessory conditions, cause shape and size to vary without affecting the structure. The pea that clings to the earth, and the acacia that shoots up into the air, are closely-related leguminosæ; a stem of wheat three feet high, and a bamboo of thirty feet, are kindred graminæ; the same fern, so diminutive in our climate, becomes a large tree in the tropics.—In like manner, also in one of



the vertebrata, the number, the arrangement, and the functions of members, are less important than the possession of mammæ. It may be aquatic, terrestrial, ærial, and undergo all the changes which a change of locality comports, without, on that account, the structure which renders it capable of suckling being altered or destroyed. The bat and the whale are mammalia, like the dog, the horse, and man. The formative forces which have drawn out the members of the bat, and changed his hands into wings; which have joined, shortened, and almost effaced the posterior members of the whale, have not had any effect, in one case or in the other, on the organ which gives to the young its food and the flying mammal like the swimming mammal remain brothers of the mammal that walks.—Thus is it with the whole scale of beings, and with the whole scale of characters. Such an organic arrangement is a more onerous weight, because forces capable of moving a lesser one fail in doing so.

Consequently, when one of these masses is

disturbed, it carries along with it corresponding masses. In other words, one character brings and bears away with it characters all the more invariable and the more important, because it is more invariable and more important itself. For example, the presence of the wing, being a very subordinate character, carries with it but very slight modifications, and remains without effect on the general structure. Animals of a different class may possess wings; alongside of birds are winged mammalia like bats, winged lizards like the ancient *ptéro-dactyl* and flying fishes like the *exocetus*. Indeed, the arrangement which renders an animal able to fly is of so little consequence, that it is met with even in different orders; not only do many of the vertebrata have wings, but, again, many of the articulatæ; and, on the other hand, this power is so little important that it is in turn present or absent in the same class; five families of insects fly, and one, that of the aptera does not fly.—On the contrary, the presence of mammæ, being a very important character, bears with it important

modifications and in its principal traits determines the structure of the animal. All the mammifers belong to the same division ; as soon as a mammifer appears, it is necessarily one of the vertebrata. Moreover, the presence of mammæ is always accompanied by a double circulation, viviparous birth, and a membranous lining of the lungs which the rest of the vertebrata, birds, reptiles, fishes, and amphibious organisms, exclude. In general read the name of a class, of a family, of any order of natural beings ; the name which expresses the essential character shows you the organic feature selected as its sign. Then read the two or three lines following it : you will therein find enumerated a series of characters which are for the former inseparable accompaniments, and whose importance and number measure the grandeur of the masses which come and go along with it.

If now we attempt to get at the reason which gives superior importance and invariability to certain characters it will generally be found in what follows : in a living being there are two

parts, the elements and their combination ; the combination is ulterior while the elements are primitive ; we may derange the combination without affecting the elements ; we cannot alter the elements without deranging the combination. We must accordingly distinguish two sorts of characters, some profound, innate, original, fundamental, which are those of the elements or materials ; the others superficial, external, derived and superposed, those of combination or arrangement. Such is the principle of the most fruitful theory of the natural sciences, that of analogy, by which Geoffroy St. Hilaire has explained the structure of animals and Goethe the structure of plants. In the skeleton of an animal it is necessary to point out two series of characters, the one which comprises the anatomical elements and their connexions, the other comprehending their elongations, their contractions, their jointures and their adaptation to this or that function. The former are primitive and the latter are derived ; the same articulations with the same relation-

ships appear in the arm of man, in the wing of the bat, in the vertebral column of the horse, in the leg of the cat and in the fin of a whale; elsewhere, as in the slow-worm and the boa-constrictor, parts become useless, subsist in a rudimentary state, and these being conserved, as well as the unity of the plan being maintained, bear witness to the elementary forces which all subsequent transformations have been unable to abolish.—In the same manner it has been shown that, primitively and fundamentally, all the parts of a flower are leaves; and this distinction of two natures, the one essential, the other accessory, has accounted for abortions, monstrosities, analogies, as numerous as obscure, by opposing the inner web of the living tissue to the folds, seams and amplifications which go to hide and diversify it.—A general rule proceeds from these partial manifestations, seeing that in order to unravel the most important character, we must consider being in its origin or in its constituents; to observe it in its simplest form as is the case in embryogeny, or to mark distinctive characters

which are common to its elements, as is done in anatomy and general physiology. In short it is according to the characters furnished by the embryo, or according to the mode of development common to all the parts, that the immense body of plants is now classified ; these two characters are of such great importance that they mutually involve each other, and contribute, both of them, to establish the same classification. According as the embryo is, or is not provided with small primitive leaves ; according as it possesses one or two of these leaves it takes its place in one of the three divisions of the vegetable kingdom. If it has two of these leaves its stem is formed of concentric layers, and harder in the centre than at the circumference ; its root is supplied by the primary axis, and its floral verticils are composed, almost always, of two or five pieces, or of their multiples. If it has but one of these leaves its stem is formed of scattered groups and is found softer in the centre than at the circumference its root is supplied by the secondary axis, and its floral verticils are composed almost

always of three pieces or of their multiples. Correspondences as general and as stable are met with in the animal kingdom ; and the conclusion which, at the end of their labor, the natural sciences bequeath to the moral sciences is that characters are more or less important according as they are forces more or less great ; that the measure of their force is found in the degree of their resistance to the attack ; that, therefore, their greater or less invariability gives them a higher or lower hierarchical position ; and that, in short, their invariability is all the greater when they constitute in being a more profound substratum, and belong not to its combination but to its elements.

## II.

Let us apply this principle to man ; at first to the moral man and to the arts which take him for object ; that is to say to dramatic music, to the romance, to the drama, to the epic and to literature in general. What constitutes the order of the importance of characters, and how verify their different degrees of variability ? History supplies us with very sure and very simple means ; for events, in working upon man, modify in various proportions the various layers of ideas and of sentiments which we remark in him. Time scores us and furrows us as a pickaxe the soil, and thus exposes our moral geology ; under its action our superposed surfaces disappear in turn, some faster and others more slowly. The earliest strokes of the pick easily scratch off a loose soil, a sort of soft alluvion and wholly external ; later come harder packed gravel and thicker beds of sand which, in order to disappear, require more prolonged labor. Lower down stretch layers of



calcareous stone, marbles and shale all immovable and compact ; entire ages of continuous labor, profound excavations and repeated blastings are necessary in order to effect results. Lower down still is buried at immeasurable distances, the primitive granite, the support of the rest, and, powerful as the attack of centuries may be, time fails entirely to remove it.

On the surface of man are grafted manners, ideas, a kind of character which lasts three or four years, such as that of fashion and the passing hour. A traveller who has been to America or to China finds that Paris is not the same Paris he left behind him. He feels like a provincialist and an exile ; the pleasures of life wear a changed aspect ; the vocabulary of the clubs and of the minor theatres is different ; the exquisite who rules in matters of fashion has no longer the same sort of elegance ; he displays other vests and other cravats ; his scandals and his follies are manifested in another way ; his name itself is even a novelty, he becomes in turn the *petit-maitre*, the fop, the coxcomb, the dandy,

the lion, the *gandlin*, the *cocodès* and *le petit crevé*. A few years suffice to sweep away and replace the name and the thing; the variations of the toilette measure the variations of this sort of creature; among all the varieties of man it is the most superficial and empty. Below this we find a substratum of character a little more solid; it lasts twenty, thirty, and forty years, about the half of a historic period. We have just seen the end of one, that which had its centre in the society of 1830. You will find its representative personage in the "Antony" of Alexander Dumas, in the young heroes of the drama of Victor Hugo, in the souvenirs and narratives of your uncles and of your fathers. It refers to the man of strong passions and sombre reveries, to the enthusiast and the poet, to the politician and the revolutionist, to the humanitarian and the innovator, the would-be consumptive, the seeming fatalist, wearing the tragic vests and the pompous hair to be seen in the engravings of Dévéria; he now seems to us at once bombastic and artless, but we cannot refuse to recognize him as being

ardent and magnanimous. In short he is the plebeian of a new class, richly endowed with faculties and with desires, who, having for the first time attained to the heights of society boisterously displays the trouble of his mind and of his heart. His sentiments and his ideas are those of an entire generation ; hence it is that an entire generation has to elapse before we can see them disappear. This is the second substratum, and the time taken by history to dispose of it shows us the degree of its importance in showing us the degree of its depth.

We have now reached the substratum of the third order, which is very vast and very deep. The characters composing it last a whole historic period, like the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Classic period. The same uniformity of mind prevailed then during one or many centuries and opposed itself to the secret assaults, to the violent destruction, to all the sapping and undermining which, during the whole period, constantly attacked it. Our grandfathers witnessed the disappearance of one of these periods,

that of the Classic period which finished, as to politics, with the revolution of 1789 ; and, as to literature, with Delille and M. de Fontanes, and, as to religion, with the appearance of Joseph de Maistre and the fall of Gallicanism. It had commenced in politics with Richelieu, in literature with Malherbe, in religion with that peaceful and spontaneous reform which, in the beginning of the seventeenth century, renewed French Catholicism. It has lasted nearly two centuries, and it may be recognized by unmistakable signs. To the costume of the cavalier and bully, which the exquisites of the Renaissance wore, succeeds the genuine dress-coat such as is necessary for drawing-rooms and the court ; the peruke, cuffs, the Rhinegrave, the easy-setting garment adapted to the varied and measured movements of the man of the world ; embroidered and gilded silks decked with laces, the pleasing and majestic attire made for seigneurs who desire to shine and yet preserve their rank. Through continued and accessory changes this costume lasts up to the moment when panta-

loons, the republican boot and the grave, useful black coat came to replace shoe-buckles, tight silk-hose, lace frills, figured waistcoats and the rose-colored, or light-blue, or apple-green coat of the old court. Throughout this interval one character prevails which Europe still gives us credit for, that of the polished gallant Frenchman, expert in the art of treating others courteously, brilliant in conversation, fashioned, more or less remotely, according to the courtier of Versailles, loyal to the noble style and to all the monarchical proprieties of language and of manners. A group of doctrines and of sentiments are joined to these, or are derived from them; religion, the state, philosophy, love, the family then receive the imprint of the prevailing character; and this sum of moral aptitudes constitutes one of the grand types which the human memory will always cherish, because it recognizes in it one of the leading forms of human development.

However firm and stable these types may be they come to an end. We see, for eighty years past, the Frenchman, engrossed by the demo-

cratic regime, lose much of his politeness, the greater part of his gallantry, intensifying, diversifying and varying his tone of character, and comprehending in a novel way all the great interests of society and of the human mind. A people, in the course of its long life, goes through many such reiterations; and yet it remains intact, not only by the continuity of the generations composing it, but also by the persistence of the character underlying it. Herein consists the primitive substratum; beneath the strong foundation which the historic periods bear away, deepens and extends itself a foundation much stronger, which the historic periods do not bear away. If you consider in turn the leading races from their first appearance up to the present time you will always find in them a class of instincts and of aptitudes over which revolutions, decadences, civilization have passed without having affected them. These aptitudes and these instincts are in the blood and are transmitted with it; in order to change them a change of blood is necessary, that is to say an invasion,

a permanent conquest, and consequently, comminglings of race, or, at least, a change of the physical *milieu*, that is to say an emigration and the slow effect of a new climate, in short a transformation of temperament and of the physical structure. When, in the same country the blood remains nearly unmixed the same character of spirit and of mind which shows itself in the former grandfathers is again found in the latest grandchildren. The Achaian of Homer, the loquacious and babbling hero who on the battle-field relates genealogies and histories to his adversary before giving him blows with his lance, is substantially the same as the Athenian of Euripides, philosopher, sophist, and wrangler who utters in the open theatre the maxims of the schools and the pleadings of the agora; we see him later in the diletant, complacent, parasitic *Græculus* of the Roman sovereignty; in the bibliophilist critic of Alexandria; in the disputation theologian of the Lower Empire; the John Cantacuzenes and the wranglers who, become infatuated over the uncreated light of Mount

Athos, are the true sons of Nestor and of Ulysses; through twenty-five centuries of civilization and of decadence prevails the same power of language, of analysis, of dialectics and of subtilty.—In like manner the Anglo-Saxon such as we behold him through the manners, the civil laws and the ancient poesy of the barbaric epoch, a sort of ferocious, carnivorous and militant brute, but heroic and endowed with noble moral and poetic instincts, reappears, after five hundred years of Norman conquest and of French importations, in the impassioned and imaginative drama of the Renaissance, in the brutality and licentiousness of the Restoration, in the sombre and austere puritanism of the Revolution, in the foundation of political liberty and the triumph of moral culture, in the energy, the pride, the sadness, the elevation of character and the maxims which, in England, sustain, at the present day, the laborer and the citizen.—Let us look at the Spaniard described by Strabo and the latin historians, solitary, haughty, indomitable, dressed in black; and let us behold him later, in the



middle ages, the same in his leading traits although the Visigoths cast a little new blood into his veins, as obstinate, as untractable and as arrogant, driven to the sea by the Moors and regaining step by step all his patrimony by a crusade of eight centuries, still exalted and hardened by the length and the monotony of the struggle, fanatical and narrow, limited to the ways of the inquisitor and the knight just as in the times of the Cid, under Philip II., under Charles II., in the war of 1700, and in the war of 1808, and in the chaos of despotisms and of insurrections which he maintains at the present day.—Let us consider in fine, the Gauls, our ancestors: the Romans said of them that they prided themselves on two things, namely, to fight bravely and to talk adroitly.\* These, indeed, are the great natural gifts which show themselves the most in our labors and in our history: on the one hand, the military spirit, brilliant and sometimes foolish courage; on the other, literary talent, the

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\* *Duas res industriosissimè persequitur gens Gallorum, rem militarem et argutè loqui.*

charm of conversation and delicacy of style. Immediately on the formation of our language in the twelfth century the Frenchman, gay, artful, fond of amusing himself and others, who talks easily and too much, who knows how to address women, who loves to shine, who exposes himself boastingly and also through impulse, sensitive to the idea of honor, less sensitive to the idea of duty, appears in literature and in society. The songs of the troubadours and the fables, the Romance of the Rose, Charles of Orleans, Joinville and Froissart, represent him to you such as you are to see him later in Villon, Brantome and Rabelais; such as he will be again in the time of his greatest glory, in the time of La Fontaine, Molière, and Voltaire, in the charming drawing-rooms of the eighteenth century and even down to the century of Berenger. Thus is it with every people; it suffices to compare one epoch of its history with the contemporary epoch of another history in order to find again under secondary changes the national character always intact and persistent.

This is the primitive foundation ; it lasts the whole life of a people, and serves as a support to the successive strata which successive periods happen to deposit on the surface.—If you were to go further down you would find other foundations still deeper ; there are the obscure and gigantic strata which linguistic science is beginning to lay bare. Underlying the characters of communities are the characters of races. Certain general traits denote old relationships between nations of a different genius ; the Latins, the Greeks, the Germans, the Slavonians, the Celts, the Persians, the Hindoos are offshoots of the same ancient trunk ; neither migrations, crossings, nor transformations of temperament have been able to graft on them certain philosophical and social aptitudes, certain general ways of conceiving morality, of comprehending nature, of expressing thought. On the other hand these fundamental traits which are common to all of them are not to be found in a different race such as the Semites or the Chinese ; these possess others and of the same

order. The different races are to each other in moral as a vertebrata, an articulata, a mollusk are to each other in physical relationship ; they are beings organized according to distinct plans and belonging to distinct divisions.—Finally, at the lowest stage, are found the characters peculiar to every superior race capable of spontaneous civilization, that is to say endowed with that aptitude for general ideas which is the appanage of man and which leads him to found societies, religions, philosophies and arts ; similar dispositions subsist through all the differences of race, and the physiological diversities which master the rest do not succeed in affecting them.

Such is the order in which are superposed the layers of sentiments, of ideas, of aptitudes and of instincts composing the human soul. You see how in descending from the higher to the lower we find them always more complex, and how their importance is measured by their stability. The rule that we have borrowed from the natural sciences here finds its full application and

verifies itself in all its consequences. For the characters the most stable are in civil as in natural history the most elementary, the most profound and the most general. In the psychological, as well as in the organic individual, it is necessary to distinguish the primitive as well as the later characters, the elements which are primordial and their arrangement which is derived. Now a character is elementary when it is common to all the movements of the intellect: such is the aptitude to think by means of vivid imagery, or by long chains of ideas exactly concatenated; it is not peculiar to certain particular movements of the intellect; it establishes its empire over all the provinces of human thought, and exercises its action over all the productions of the human mind; as soon as man reasons, imagines, and speaks it is present and paramount; it impels him on in a certain direction, it closes to him certain issues. Thus is it with others. Thus the more elementary a character is the more extended is its ascendancy. But the more its ascendancy is extended the more stable

it is. There are situations already very general and, consequently, dispositions not less general, which determine historic periods and their leading representatives—the wayward and insatiate plebeian of our century, the aristocratic courtier and drawing-room favorite of the classic era, the lonely and independent baron of the middle ages. There are characters much more profound and wholly belonging to the physical temperament which constitute national genius: in Spain the need of sharp and keen sensations and the terrible explosion of an exalted and concentrated imagination; in France the need of clear and affiliated ideas and the easy movement of the facile reason. They are the most elementary dispositions; a language with or without a grammar, a phrase capable or incapable of a period, a thought at one time reduced to a dry algebraic notation, at another, flexible, poetic, and subtle, at another, impassioned, keen, and violently explosive which constitute the races like those of the Chinese, the Aryans and the Semites. Here, as in natural history, it is necessary to

note the embryo of the nascent mind in order to discover in it the distinctive traits of the complete and developed mind ; the characters of the primitive age are the most significant of all ; as according to the presence, the absence, or the number of the cotyledons we divine the order to which the plant and the principal traits of its type belong, so, according to the structure of language and the nature of myths we can form an idea of the future form of religion, of philosophy, of society and of art.—You perceive that in the human kingdom as in the animal or vegetable kingdom the principle of the subordination of characters establishes the same hierarchy: the superior rank and the first importance belong to the most stable characters ; and if these are more stable it is that, being more elementary, they are present on a much larger surface and are swept away only by a greater revolution.

## III.

To this scale of moral values corresponds, step by step, the scale of literary values. All things in other respects being equal, according as the character set forth in a book is more or less important, that is to say more or less elementary and stable, this book becomes more or less beautiful, and you will see the layers of the moral strata communicate to the literary works which express them, their proper degree of power and duration.

There is, at first, a literature of fashion which expresses the character in the fashion; it lasts, like that character, three or four years and sometimes less; it commonly blossoms and decays with the leaves of the year: it consists of the romance, the farce, the pamphlet, the novelty in vogue. Read, if you have the courage to do so, a vaudeville or a humorous piece of the year 1835,—you will let it drop out of your hand. Attempts are often made to reproduce it on the



stage; twenty years ago it was the rage; to-day the audience yawn and the piece quickly disappears from the play-bills. This or that romance, once sung at every piano, is now ludicrous; we find it insipid and discordant; it is at best only encountered in some remote and antiquated province; it expresses only some of those evanescent sentiments which a slight variation in customs suffices to do away with; it has become old-fashioned, and we are surprised at ourselves for having been pleased with such foolish things. Thus, from among the innumerable writings which see the light, time makes its selection; superficial and slightly persistent characters are borne away with the works which express them.

Other works correspond to characters somewhat more durable, and seem to be masterpieces to the generations which read them. Such was that famous "*Astrée*" which D'Urfé composed at the commencement of the seventeenth century—a pastoral romance, of infinite length and yet greater dulness, a bower of foliage and flowers to which men, weary with the slaughter

and brigandage of religious wars, betook themselves to listen to the sighs and sentimentalities of Celadon. Such were the romances of Mademoiselle de Scudery—the “Grand Cyrus,” and “Clelie,”—in which the exaggerated, refined and measured gallantry introduced into France by the Spanish queens, the noble dissertation on the new language, the mysteries of the heart and the ceremonial of politeness, were displayed like the majestic robes and formal reverences of the Hotel de Rambouillet. Countless works had this kind of merit which to-day are nothing more than historical documents: for example, the “Euphues” of Lilly, the “Adonis” of Marini, the “Hudibras” of Butler, and the biblical pastorals of Gessner. We are not without such writings now-a-days, but I prefer not to mention them; I will only remark that about 1806 “M. Esmenard held at Paris the position of a great man,”\* and enumerate the multitude of works which seemed sublime at the beginning of the

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\* An expression of Stendhal's.

literary revolution of which we now see the end—"Atala," "The Last of the Abencerrages," the "Natchez" and many of Madame de Stäel's and Lord Byron's personages. At present the first stage of the journey has been passed over, and, stationed where we are, we detect without any difficulty the exaggeration and the affectation which contemporaries did not suspect. The celebrated elegy of Millevoye on the "Chute des Feuilles" leaves us as unmoved as the "Messéniennes" of Casimir Delavigne; it is because the two works, half classic and half romantic, corresponded by their mixed character to a generation placed on the frontier of two periods, and their success has had precisely the duration of the moral character which they manifested.

Many very remarkable cases show most clearly how the value of a work increases and decreases with the value of the character expressed. It seems that here nature yoked together experience and counter-experience with premeditated purpose. We might cite writers who have left one work of the first among twenty of the secondary

order. In both cases the talent, the education, the preparation, the effort was all alike ; nevertheless, in the first, there issued from the crucible, an ordinary work ; in the second, a masterpiece saw the light. This is due to the fact that in the first case the writer expressed only superficial and transitory characters, whilst in the second he seized upon enduring and profound characters. Le Sage wrote twelve volumes of romances imitated from the Spanish, and the Abbé Prevost twenty volumes of tragic and pathetic novels ; the curious alone seek these out, while everybody has read Gil Blas and Manon Lescaut. The reason of this is that a happy accident twice brought to the artist's hand a stable type of which every man encounters traits in the society around him or in the sentiments of his own breast. Gil Blas is a bourgeois with a classic education, having passed through all conditions of society and made a fortune, easy in his conscience, somewhat a valet his whole life, a little *picaro* in his youth, accommodating himself to the standard of worldly morality, by

no means a stoic and still less a patriot, securing his own share of the cake and freely biting into that of the public, but gay, sympathetic, no hypocrite, capable occasionally of self-judgment having fits of honesty with a substratum of honor and benevolence, and winding up with a well-regulated and straight-forward life. A like character, adopting the medium in all things, and a like destiny, so tangled and diversified, is daily encountered and will be again to-morrow as it was in the eighteenth century.—In a similar manner, in *Manon Lescaut*, the courtesan who is an amiable girl, immoral through the craving for luxury, but affectionate by instinct, and capable in the end of returning a love equal to the absolute love which made all sacrifices for her, is a type of so permanent a nature that George Sand in *Leone Leoni* and Victor Hugo in *Marion Delorme* have taken it up to put it again upon the stage, simply reversing the parts and changing the time.—De Foe wrote two hundred volumes, and Cervantes I know not how many dramas and romances, the former with the truth-

ful detail, the minutiae, the dry precision of a puritan business-man, and the latter with the invention, the glow, the insufficiency, the generosity of a Spanish cavalier and adventurer: of the one there remains Robinson Crusoe, and of the other Don Quixote. It is because Robinson Crusoe is, at first, the genuine Englishman completely embodying the profound instincts of the race still visible in the sailor and in the colonial squatter of his country, violent and savage in his resolutions, protestant and biblical at heart, with those silent fermentations of the imagination and of the conscience which lead to crises of conversion and of grace, energetic, obstinate, patient, indefatigable, born for labor, capable of clearing away and colonizing continents; it is because the same personage, apart from national character, presents to the eye the severest experience of human life and an abridgment of all human invention, showing the individual torn from civilized society and constrained to recover by his solitary effort so many arts and so many industries, of which the benefits surround him

hourly and unconsciously as water surrounds the fish.—In like manner, in *Don Quixote* we see at first the chivalrous and morbid Spaniard, such as eight centuries of crusades and of overcharged reveries had made him, but, besides this, one of the eternal prototypes of human history, the heroic, sublime, visionary, meager and broken-down idealist : in order to strengthen the impression, and by way of contrast, we see alongside of him the sage, matter-of-fact, vulgar and gross bumpkin.—May I still cite to you another of those immortal personages in which a race and an epoch are recognized, and whose name becomes one of the current terms of a language, the *Figaro* of Beaumarchais, a kind of *Gil Blas* more nervous and more revolutionary than the other? And yet the author was simply a man of talent ; he was too sparkling with wit to create, like Molière, spirits that live ; but, one day, drawing a picture of himself, with his gayety, his expedients, his irreverence, his repartees, his courage, his natural good-heartedness, his inexhaustible vivacity, he has delineated, without so intending

it, the portrait of the true Frenchman, and his talent rose to genius.—There occur counter verifications, and there are cases where genius descends to talent. Many a writer who knows how to mould and put in motion the greatest personages leaves in his group of figures a crowd of inanimate beings, who, at the end of a century, seem dead or repulsive, open to ridicule, whose whole interest belongs to antiquaries and historians. For example the lovers of Racine are all marquises; all their character is in their good behavior; their sentiments are so fashioned as to please dandies; he makes them gallants; in his hands they become court-puppets; even now intelligent foreigners cannot endure M. Hippolyte and M. Xiphares.—In the same way the clowns of Shakespeare amuse no more, and his young gentlemen appear extravagant; one must be a critic and an expert in order to place himself at the proper point of view; their play on words is offensive, and their metaphors are unintelligible; their pretentious jargon is a conventionalism of the sixteenth century, as the



refined tirade is one of the proprieties of the seventeenth century. There are also fashionable personages; the exterior and the effect of the hour are so predominant in them that the rest disappear.—You perceive, by this twofold experience, the importance of profound and enduring characters, since a lack of them degrades a great man's work to the second rank, and their presence exalts the work of a lesser talent to the first rank.

It is for this reason that if one goes through the great literary works, he will find that all manifest a profound and durable character, and that their rank is higher according as this character is more durable and more profound. They are generalizations which present to the mind under a sensible form at one time the principal traits of a historical period, at another the primordial instincts and faculties of a race, at another some fragment of the universal man and those elementary psychological forces which are the ultimate explanation of human events. In order to be convinced of this we need not pass

in review the various literary works. It will be sufficient to note the use which is now made of literary works in history. It is through these that the deficiencies of memoirs, constitutions, and diplomatic documents are supplied; they show us with an astonishing precision and clearness, the sentiments of diverse epochs, the instincts and aptitudes of diverse races, all the great secret springs whose equilibrium maintains societies and whose discords lead to revolutions. The positive history and chronology of ancient India are almost useless; but its heroic and sacred poems remain to us, and in these we see its spirit laid bare, that is to say the order and condition of its imagination, the extent and connection of its dreams, the depth and disorder of its philosophical divinations and the inner principle of its religion and of its institutions.—Let us consider Spain at the end of the sixteenth and at the beginning of the seventeenth century. If you read *Lazarillo de Tomès* and the *picaresque* romances, if you study the drama of Lope de Vega, of Calderon and other dramatists, you will

see rising before you two living figures, the beggar and the cavalier, who will show you all the misery, all the grandeur and all the folly of this strange civilization.—The more perfect a work is the deeper are the characteristics portrayed in it. We might extract from Racine the whole system of the monarchical sentiments of our seventeenth century,—the portrait of the king, of the queen, of the children of France, of noble courtiers, ladies of honor, and prelates; all the dominant ideas of the time,—feudal fidelity, chivalric honor, servility of the ante-chamber, the decorum of the palace, the devotion of servants and subjects, the perfection of manners, the sway and tyranny of propriety, the natural and artificial niceties of language, of the heart, of Christianity and of morality; in short, the habits and sentiments which make up the principal traits of the ancient regime.—Our greatest modern epics, the *Divine Comedy* and *Faust*, are summaries of two grand European historical epochs. One shows us the way in which the Middle Ages regarded life, and the other the way in

which we regard it. Both of them express the highest truth to which two sovereign minds, each in its time, attained. Dante's poem depicts the man who, transported outside of this ephemeral world, traverses the supernatural, the sole definitive and subsisting world; he was conducted by two powers, the exalted love which then controlled human life, and systematic theology which was then the queen of speculative thought; his poetic dream, by turns horrible and sublime, is the mystic reverie which then seemed the perfect state of the human mind. Goethe's poem depicts the man who, led through all the ways of science and of life, gets bruised and disgusted, wanders and gropes around, and finally settles down resignedly into practical life without, among so many painful experiences and unsatisfied questionings, ever ceasing to realize behind its legendary veil that superior realm of ideal forms and of incorporeal forces on the threshold of which thought is arrested, and to which alone the divinations of the heart can penetrate. Among so many finished works

which manifest the essential character of a race, or an epoch, there are some which, by a singular chance, express, moreover, some sentiment, some type, common to almost all groups of humanity; such are the Hebrew Psalms that confront the monotheistic man with the Almighty Judge and Sovereign God; the "Imitation" which shows the communion of the tender soul with the loving and consoling Redeemer; the poems of Homer and the dialogues of Plato, which represent the heroic youth of the active man, or the charming adolescence of the reflective man; nearly all that Greek literature which possessed the privilege of representing healthy and simple sentiments; Shakespeare, in fine, the greatest in original creations, the deepest observer of man, the most clear-sighted of all those who have comprehended the mechanism of the human passions, the mute fermentations and the violent explosions of the imaginative brain, the unforeseen derangements of consciousness, the tyranny of the flesh and blood, the fatalities of character and the obscure causes of our sanity and in-

sanity. Don Quixote, Candide, and Robinson Crusoe, are books of a like scope. Works of this class survive the century and the people to whom they owe their origin. They pass beyond the ordinary limits of time and space; they are understood wherever we find a thinking mind; their popularity is indestructible and their duration infinite. A final proof of the connection between moral and literary values, and of the principle which arranges the works of art above or below each other, according to the importance, the stability and the depth of the historic or psychological character which they have expressed.

## IV

It is now for us to construct a similar scale for the physical man and for the arts representing him, namely sculpture, and especially painting; pursuing the same method, we shall, at first, seek what are, in the physical man, the most stable characters, since they are the most important ones.

It is clear, in the first place, that a fashionable coat is of very secondary importance; it changes every two years, or at least, every ten years. So is it with dress in general; it is an externality and a decoration; it may be taken off with a turn of the hand; the essential thing in the living form is the living body itself; the rest is accessory and artificial. Other characters which, in this instance, belong to the body itself, are likewise of secondary importance; they are the peculiarities of a profession and of a trade. A blacksmith has other arms than a

lawyer; an officer walks differently from a priest; a countryman who labors all day in the sun has other muscles, another color to his skin, another curve of the spine, other wrinkles on the brow, another air, than the city denizen shut up in a drawing-room or in his counting-room. These characters have unquestionably a certain solidity; man preserves them all his life; once contracted, the wrinkle remains; a very slight accident was sufficient to produce these, and another accident not less slight might have sufficed to remove them. Their sole cause consists of an accident of birth or of education; change the condition, and the *milieu* of the man, and you will find in him opposite peculiarities; the citizen reared like the countryman will have the air of the countryman, and the countryman reared like the citizen will have the air of a citizen. The original character will remain, when thirty years' education will be apparent, if apparent at all, only to the psychologist and moralist; the body will preserve only imperceptible traits of it, and the innate and stable



characters, which are its essence, compose a layer much deeper and wholly unaffected by these passing causes.

Other influences equally affecting the soul leave but a feeble impression on the body; I allude to historical epochs. The system of ideas and of sentiments which engrossed the human brain under Louis XIV. was quite different from that of the present day, but the physical framework differed but slightly; the most we can discover, in consulting the portraits, statues, and engravings of that day, is a more imposing habit of noble and dignified attitudes. That which varies the most is the expression; a Renaissance countenance, such as we see it in the portraits by Bronzino and Van Dyke, is stronger and more simple than a modern face; for the last three centuries the swarm of subtle and fleeting ideas with which we are penetrated, the complexity of our tastes, the feverish uneasiness of our thoughts, the excesses of our cerebral life, the burden of continuous labor, have refined, troubled, and tormented both the face and the expression

Lastly, if we take long periods we shall be able to detect a certain alteration of the head itself; those physiologists who have measured the skulls of the twelfth century, find them to be of less capacity than our own. But history, which preserves so exact a register of moral variations, only states in mass, and very imperfectly, physical variations. The reason is, that the same alteration of the human animal, morally enormous, is very slight physically; an imperceptible modification of the brain makes a lunatic, a fool, or a man of genius; a social revolution which, at the end of two or three centuries, renews all the springs of the mind and of the will, only slightly affects the organs; and history, which furnishes the means of subordinating to each other the characters of the soul, does not furnish the means for subordinating to each other the characters of the physical being.

We are, consequently, obliged to take another course, and here again it is the principle of the subordination of characters which leads us. You have noticed that when a character is more

stable, it is because it is more elementary ; the cause of its duration is its depth. Let us seek therefore, in the living form for the characters peculiar to its elements, and for this purpose let me call your attention to a model, such as you have before your eyes in your drawing-schools. Here is a naked man ; what is there that is common to all portions of this animated surface ? What is the element which, repeated and diversified, occurs again and again in each fragment of the whole ? From the point of view of form it is a bone provided with tendons and clothed with muscles, here the omoplate and the clavicle, there the femur and the thigh-bone ; higher up the vertebral column and the skull, each with its articulations, its depressions, its projections, its aptitude for serving as fulcrum or lever, and those coils of retractile muscles which, in turn, shrink and expand in order to communicate to it its different positions and its diverse movements. An articulated skeleton and a covering of muscles, all logically enchainèd, a superb and intelligent machine for action and for effort, such is

the basis of the visible man. If now you take into account, in considering him, modifications which race, climate, and temperament superadd, softness or rigidity of muscles, diverse proportions of parts, elongation or contraction of body and limbs, you will have in hand the whole interior framework of the body, such as sculpture and drawing take it to be.—Over the naked muscles is extended a second covering, common also to all the parts,—the skin with vibrating papilla undulatingly blue through its network of small veins, yellow through the transparent casing of the tendons, red through the flow of blood, pearly in contact with the membranous tissues, now smooth and now striated, of a richness and an incomparable variety of tones, luminous in shadow, all palpitating in the light, betraying by its nervous sensibility the delicacy of the soft pulp and the renewal of the fluent flesh, of which it is the transparent veil. If, besides this, you remark the diversities which race, climate, and temperament contribute to it; if you note how in the lymphatic, bilious, or sanguine subject it is

found now tender, flabby, rosy white and wan, now firm, consistent, amber-tinted, and ferruginous, you will grasp the second element of visible life, that which belongs to the domain of the painter, and which the colorist alone can express. These constitute the deep-seated and inner characters of the physical man, and I have no need to point out that they are stable since they are inseparable from the living individual.

## V.

To this scale of physical values corresponds, step by step, a scale of plastic values. Moreover, other things being equal, according as the character brought into light by a picture or a statue is more or less important, this picture and this statue are more or less beautiful. This is why you find in the lowest rank, those drawings, aquarelles, pastels, and statuettes, which in man do not depict the man, but his dress, and especially the dress of the day. Illustrated reviews are full of them; they might almost be called fashion-plates; every exaggeration of costume is therein displayed: wasp-like waists, monstrous skirts, overloaded and fantastic head-dresses; the artist is heedless of the deformity of the human body; that which gives him pleasure is the fashion of the moment, the gloss of stuffs, the close fitting of a glove, the perfection of the chignon. Alongside of the scribbler with the pen he is the scribbler with the pencil;

he may have a good deal of talent and wit, but he appeals only to a transient taste ; in twenty years his coats will be completely out of date. Countless sketches of this description which, in 1830, were in vogue, are, at the present hour, simply historic or grotesque. Numbers of portraits in our annual exhibitions are nothing but portraits of costumes, and, alongside of the painters of man, are the painters of *moire-antique* and of *satin*.

Other painters, although superior to these, still remain on the lower steps of art ; or rather they have some talent besides their art ; they are badly-placed observers, born to compose romances and studies on society, and who, instead of the pen, have taken up the brush. That which strikes them is the peculiarities of a calling, of a profession, of training, the impress of vice or of virtue, of passion or of habit ; Hogarth, Wilkie, Mulready, and hosts of English painters possessed this gift so slightly picturesque and so literary. They see in the physical man only the moral man ; with them color,

drawing, truthfulness, and the beauty of the living body, are subordinate. It suffices for them to represent by forms, attitudes and colors, at one time the frivolity of a fashionable woman, at another the honest sorrow of an old steward, at another the debasement of a gambler, and innumerable petty dramas or comedies of real life, all instructive or diverting, and almost all with a view to inspire good sentiments or to correct abuses. Properly speaking, they delineate nothing but spirits, minds, and emotions. They incline so strongly to this side as to outrage form and render it inflexible; frequently their pictures are caricatures, and always illustrations, the illustrations to a village idyl, or to a domestic romance which Burns, Fielding, or Dickens might better have written. The same prepossessions attend them when treating historical subjects; they treat them not as painters, but as historians, in order to display the moral sentiments of a personage or of an epoch,—the expression of a Lady Russell contemplating her condemned husband piously receiving the sacra-



ment, the despair of Edith with the swan's neck on discovering Harold among the dead at Hastings. Composed of archeological researches and of psychological documents, their work appeals only to archeologists and to psychologists, or at least, to the curious and to philosophers. At most, it answers the purpose of a satire or of a drama; the spectator is made to laugh or to weep, as at the fifth act of a play on the stage. It is evident, nevertheless, that this order of art is eccentric; it is an encroachment of painting on literature, or rather an invasion of literature on the domain of painting. Our artists of the school of 1830, Delaroche among the first, fell, although less gravely, into the same mistake. The beauty of a plastic work is, above all, plastic, and an art always degenerates when, discarding its own peculiar means for exciting interest, it borrows those of another art.

I now come to the great example in which are combined all others, namely, the history of painting in general, and foremost, of that Italian painting, on which I have been commenting for

the past three years. A series of proofs and counter-proofs here shows during five hundred years the picturesque value of the character which the theory prescribes as the essence of the physical man. At one particular time the human animal,—the bony framework covered with muscles, the sensitive and colored flesh and skin,—were comprehended and animated for themselves alone, and above everything else; this is the grand epoch; the works it has left to us pass for the most beautiful in the judgment of all; all schools resort to them in quest of models and to be instructed. At other epochs the idea of the figure is, at one time, incomplete, and at another mingled with other preoccupations and subordinated to other preferences; these are the periods of infancy, of transformation, or of decadence; however richly endowed artists may be, they execute at such times only inferior or secondary works; their talent is not wisely applied; they have not caught, or they have imperfectly caught, the fundamental character of the visible man. Thus is the value of the

work, in all directions, proportionate to the domination of this character ; it is important for the writer, above all things, to produce living characters ; and it is equally important for the sculptor and the painter to create living bodies. It is according to this principle that you have seen classed the successive periods of art. From Cimabue to Masaccio the painter ignores perspective, modelling and anatomy ; he contemplates the palpable and solid body only through a veil ; consistency, vitality, the moving framework, the acting muscles of the trunk and of the limbs do not interest him ; personages, with him, consist of outlines and of shadows of men, and, sometimes, of glorified and incorporeal spirits. The religious sentiment prevails over the plastic instinct ; it portrays to the eye theological symbols with Taddeo Gaddi, moralities with Orcagna, and seraphic visions with Fra Angelico. The painter, arrested by the spirit of the middle ages, remains and gropes a long time at the door of great art.—When he enters, it is through the discovery of perspective, through the search for

relief, through the study of anatomy, through the use of oil, in the persons of Paolo Uccello, Masaccio, Fra Filippo Lippi, Antonio Pollaiuolo, Verocchio, Ghirlandajo, Antonello de Messine, almost all of them pupils in a goldsmith's shop, friends and successors of Donatello, Ghiberti, and other great sculptors of the age, all passionately devoted to the study of the human figure, all pagan admirers of muscles and animal energy, so penetrated by the sentiment of physical life that their works, although stiff, defaced, and infected with literal imitation, secure for them a unique position, and still maintain to-day their full value. The masters who have surpassed them have done no more than develop their principle; the glorious school of the Florentine renaissance recognizes them for its founders; Andrea del Sarto, Fra Bartolomeo, Michael Angelo, are their pupils; Raphael resorted to them to study, and one-half of his genius belongs to them. There is the centre of Italian art, and of high art. The master idea of all these artists is that of the living, healthy, ener-

getic, active body, endowed with every athletic and animal aptitude. "The important thing in the art of drawing," says Cellini, "is to make a good drawing of a naked man and woman." He speaks with enthusiasm of the admirable bones of the head; "of the omoplates which, when the arm makes an effort, describe lines of magnificent effect; of the five false ribs which, when the torso bends forward or backward, form such wonderful depressions and projections around the navel." . . . "Thou must then draw the bone situated between the two thighs, it is very beautiful, and is called the crupper, or sacrum." One of the pupils of Verocchio, Nanni Grosso, on dying in the hospital, rejected an ordinary crucifix presented to him, demanding to have one by Donatello brought, declaring that "otherwise he would die unshrived, so disagreeable to him were the badly executed works of his art." Luca Signorelli, having lost a beloved son, caused his corpse to be stripped and made a minute drawing of all its muscles; these were to him the essential of the man, and he stamped

on his memory those of his own child.—At this moment, one step only remains to be taken in order to complete the physical man : more stress must be laid on the coating of the muscles, on the softness and tone of the living skin, on the delicate and varied vitality of the sensitive flesh : Correggio and the Venetians take this step and art stands still. Thenceforth, art is in full bloom, the sentiment of the human body has attained to its completest expression. It declines gradually ; we see it decreasing, losing a portion of its sincerity and its gravity under Julio Romano, Rosso, and Primaticcio, and then degenerate into school conventionalism, academic traditions and studio prescriptions. From this moment art becomes transformed, notwithstanding the well-meaning studious disposition of the Caracci ; it becomes less plastic and more literary. The three Caracci, their pupils or their successors, Domenichino, Guido, Guercino and Baroccio, aim at dramatic effects, bleeding martyrs, pathetic scenes and sentimental expressions. The insipidities of sigisbeism and of

devotion mingle with reminiscences of the heroic style. You find graceful heads and beatific smiles over athletic bodies and strained muscles. The airs and the affectations of society peer out in dreamy Madonnas, in pretty Herodias and in fascinating Magdalens commissioned by the taste of the day. Painting, which is declining, strives to render delicacies which the growing opera is about to express. Albano is a boudoir painter ; Dolci, Cigoli and Sassoferrato are delicate, and almost modern, spirits. With Pietro da Cortona and Luca Giordano the grand scenes of pagan or Christian legend become transformed into agreeable masquerades for the drawing-room ; the artist is nothing but a brilliant, amusing, fashionable improvisator, the art of painting coming to an end at the same time that the art of music begins, that is to say, when the human brain ceases to contemplate the energies of the body, in order to turn to the emotions of the heart.

If now you turn to the great foreign schools, you will find that their perfection and their

excellence were based upon the predominance of the same character, and that the same sentiment of physical life engendered the masterpieces of art in the north and throughout Italy. That which distinguishes the schools among each other is the representation by each of a temperament, the temperament of its climate and of its country. The genius of the masters consists in fashioning a race of bodies ; thus regarded, they are physiologists as writers are psychologists ; they expose every variety and all the consequences of the bilious, the lymphatic, the nervous or the sanguine temperament, as the great novelists and the great dramatists expose every reaction and every diversity of the imaginative, reflective, civilized, or uncultured soul. You are familiar in the works of the Florentine artists with the erect, slender, muscular type, noble in instinct and with gymnastic aptitudes, such as may be evolved from a sober, graceful, active race, subtle in intellect and on a dry soil. I have shown you in the Venetian artists the rounded, undulatory, and regularly developed



forms, the flesh ample and white, the hair ruddy or blond, the type sensual, sprightly and contented, such as may be evolved in a moist and luminous region among Italians whose climate resembles that of the Flemings, and who are poets in the matter of voluptuousness. You may see in Rubens the white or the pale, the rosy or the ruddy German, lymphatic, sanguine, carnivorous, and a great consumer, a man of a northern and watery soil, liberally fashioned, but not clumsy; of irregular and plethoric shape, redundant in flesh, of brutal and unbridled instincts, whose flabby pulp suddenly reddens with the flux of emotion, becomes easily modified by the severities of the atmosphere and horribly disorganized in the hands of death. The Spanish painters will place before your eyes the type of their race, the wiry and nervous animal with firm muscles hardened by the blasts of their sierras and their scorching sun, tenacious and indomitable, boiling with suppressed passion, all aglow with inward fire, dark, austere and spare; among confused tones of sombre

stuffs and of dark clouds which suddenly open in order to disclose an exquisite rose, the bright carnation of youth, beauty, love and enthusiasm diffusing itself over the blooming cheeks. The greater the artist the more profoundly does he manifest the temperament of his race: without any suspicion of it he, like the poet, furnishes to history the most fruitful documents; he extracts and amplifies the essential of the physical being as the other extracts and amplifies the essential of the moral being, while the historian discerns in pictures the structure and corporeal instincts of a people as he discerns in literature the structure and spiritual aptitudes of a civilization.

## VI.

The concordance, then, is complete, and characters bear with them into a work of art the value which they already possess in nature. According as they possess in themselves a greater or less value, they communicate a greater

or less value to the work. When they traverse the intellect of the writer or of the artist, in order to pass from the real world into the ideal world, they lose nothing of what they are; they are found to be the same after as before the journey; they are, as before, greater or lesser forces, more or less resistant to attack, and capable of effects more or less vast and profound. We now comprehend why the hierarchy of works of art repeats their hierarchy. At the apex of nature are sovereign forces which master all others; at the apex of art are masterpieces which surpass all others; both heights are on a level, and the sovereign forces of nature are declared through the masterpieces of art.



## **§ 2.**

**THE DEGREE OF BENEFICENCE IN THE  
CHARACTER.**



## I.

THERE is a second point of view from which characters ought to be compared. They are natural forces, and, in this respect, they may be estimated in two ways : we may consider a force, first, in relation to other forces, and next in relation to itself. Considered in relation to other forces it is greater when it resists them and nullifies them ; considered in relation to itself it is greater when the course of its effects leads it not to diminish but to increase itself. It thus finds two standards, because it is subjected to two tests, at first in undergoing the effect of other forces, and next in undergoing its own effect. The first examination has shown us the first test, and the higher or lower rank which characters bear according as they are more or less durable, and which, subjected to the same destructive causes, last longer and more intact. A second examination will show us the second test, and the more or less exalted position char-

acters obtain according as, abandoned to themselves, they more or less completely end in annihilation, or in their own development through the annihilation or development of the individual and of the group in which they are comprised. In the first instance we have descended step by step toward those elementary forces which constitute the principle of nature itself, and you have seen the relationship between art and science. In the second instance we shall ascend step by step toward those superior forms which are the object of nature and in which you will see the relationship of art with the moral order of things. We have considered characters according as they are more or less *important*; we are about to consider characters according as they are more or less *beneficent*.

Let us commence with the moral man and with the works of art which express him. It is evident that the characters with which he is endowed are more or less beneficent, malevolent, or mixed. We see daily individuals and communities prosper, add to their power, fail in their enterprises,



ruin themselves and perish ; and each time if we view their life in its entirety we find that their fall is explained by some vice of general structure, by some exaggeration of a tendency, by the disproportion between a situation and an aptitude, in the same way as their success is caused by the stability of the inward balance, by the moderation of some craving or the energy of some faculty. In the stormy current of life characters are weights or floats which at one time make us glide along the bottom, and at another maintain us on the surface. Thus is a second scale established ; characters here are classified according as they are more or less baneful or beneficial to us through the magnitude of the help or hindrance which they contribute to our life in order to preserve or to destroy it.

The object, then, is to live, and, for the individual, life has two principal directions, knowledge and action ; and this is why we can distinguish in him two principal faculties, intelligence and will. Hence it follows that all the characters of the will and of the understanding which aid

man in action and in knowledge are beneficent, and their opposites are malevolent. In the philosopher and the savant it is the exact observation and memory of details joined to the prompt forecasting of general laws, and to the scrupulous prudence which subjects every supposition to the control of prolonged and methodical verifications. In the statesman and the business-man it is the tact of the pilot, always on the alert and always certain; it is the tenacity of common sense, the constant adaptation of the mind to the variations of things, a sort of inward balance ready to test all circumjacent forces, an imagination limited and reduced to practical contrivances, the imperturbable instinct of the possible and of the real. In the artist it is delicate sensibility, and vibrating sympathy, the inner and involuntary reproduction of things, the sudden and original comprehension of their dominant character with the spontaneous generation of all surrounding harmonies. You might find for each species of intellectual effort a group of analogous and distinct dispositions. These are so many forces

which lead man on to his ends, and it is clear that each one in its domain is beneficent since its alteration, its insufficiency, or its absence brings to this domain impoverishment and sterility.—In a like manner and in the same sense, the will is a power, and, considered in itself, a good. We admire the firm resolve which, once taken, maintains itself invincible against the pangs of physical pain, against the persistence of moral suffering, against the perturbations of sudden shocks, against the charm of tempting seductions, against every diversity of the ordeal by which, through violence or tenderness, through mental excitement or bodily weakness, it is attempted to overcome it. Whatever its support may be, whether the ecstasy of martyrs, the reason of stoics, the insensibility of savages, native stubbornness, or acquired pride, it is beautiful ; and not merely is every phase of intelligence, lucidity, genius, wit, reason, tact, delicacy, but again every phase of will, courage, the initiative, activity, firmness, coolness, are fragments of the ideal man which we now seek to construct because

they are lines of this beneficent character which we have at first traced.

We must now view this man as he is classed. What is the disposition that is to render his life a benefit to the society in which he is comprised? We are familiar with the inward instruments which are useful to him; where is the internal spring which is to render him useful to others?

One there is which is unique, the faculty of loving; for to love, is to have for one's end the happiness of another, to subordinate one's self to that other, and labor for and devote one's self to his welfare. You recognize there the highest of all beneficent characters. It is, evidently, the first of all in the scale that we are forming. We are all affected at its aspect, whatever may be its form, whether generosity, humanity, sweetness, tenderness, or native goodness. Our sympathy stirs in its presence, whatever its object may be, whether it constitutes love, properly so called—the full surrender of one human being to another of the opposite sex, and the union of two lives bound up in one; whether it culminates

in diverse family affections—that between parents and children, or between brother and sister; whether it produces strong friendship, perfect confidence, and the mutual fidelity of two men not bound together by the ties of blood. The more vast is its object, the more do we find it beautiful. It is because its beneficence extends itself along with the group to which it is applied. Hence it is that in history and in life we reserve our greatest admiration for that devotion which is rendered in behalf of general interests—for patriotism such as was seen in Rome in the time of Hannibal; in Athens, in the time of Themistocles; in France, in 1792; and in Germany, in 1813; for the great sentiment of universal charity, which has led Buddhist and Christian missionaries among barbarian people; for that impassioned zeal which has sustained so many disinterested inventors, and excited in art, in science, in philosophy, in practical life all beautiful and useful works and institutions; for all those superior virtues which, under the name of probity, justice, honor, self-

sacrifice, and self-subordination to some high all-embracing conception, develops the civilization of humanity, and of which the stoics, Marcus Aurelius in the foremost rank, have given us both precept and example. I have no need to show you how, in the scale thus constructed, opposite characters occupy the reverse position. Long has this order of things been realized. The noble, moral theories of antiquity established it with an incomparable wise discernment and simplicity of method; Cicero, with a common sense wholly Roman, has summed it up in his treatise on the "Offices." If subsequent ages have contributed to it further developments, they have mingled with these many errors; and, in morality as in art, we have always to resort to the ancients in order to obtain our maxims. The philosophers of that period declared that the stoic made his soul and intellect conform to those of Jupiter;\* the men of that day might have longed to have Jupiter make his soul and intellect conform to those of the stoic.

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\* Συζην δειοις.

## II.

To this classification of moral values corresponds, step by step, a classification of literary values. All things equal in other respects, the work which expresses a beneficent character, is superior to the work which expresses a malevolent character. If, in two given works, both exhibit, with the same talent in execution, natural forces of like grandeur, that which represents to us a hero is better than that which represents to us a dolt; and in this gallery of living works of art, which form the definitive museum of the human mind, you will see established, according to our new principle, a new order of ranks.

At the lowest step of all are the types preferred by the literature of realism and by the comic drama; that is to say, simpletons and egotists—limited, weak and inferior natures. They are those, in fact, encountered in ordinary

life, or those that can be turned into ridicule. Nowhere will you find a more complete assemblage than in the "Scènes de la vie bourgeoise" of Henri Monnier. Almost all good romances thus recruit their secondary personages; such as the Sancho of Don Quixote; the seedy sharpers of the *picaresque* romances; Fielding's squires, parsons, and servants; and Walter Scott's shrewd lairds and rigid ministers; all of that lower class of figures swarming in Balzac's *Comédie Humaine*, and in contemporary English literature, will supply us with further examples. These writers, undertaking to depict men as they are, were obliged to portray them incomplete, mixed up and inferior, most of the time abortive in their character, or distorted by their condition. As to the comic drama it is sufficient to cite Turcaret, Basile, Orgon, Arnolphe, Harpagon, Tartuffe, Georges Dandin, all of the marquises, valets, pedants, and doctors in Molière. It is the quality of the comic drama to lay bare human deficiencies. Great artists, however, on whom the exigences of their class of subjects, or



a love of strict truth, imposed studies of this sad kind, have made use of two artifices to conceal the mediocrity and repulsiveness of the characters they have figured. They have either made of them accessories or contrasts, which serve to bring out some principal figure in stronger relief—the most frequent proceeding of novelists—and which you may study in the “Don Quixote” of Cervantes, in Balzac’s “Eugénie Grandet,” and in the “Madame Bovary” of Gustave Flaubert ; or they have turned our sympathies against the personage, causing him to descend from one mishap to another, exciting against him the disapprobatory and vengeful laugh, purposely showing off the unlucky consequences of his inaptitude, and hunting out and expelling from life the defect which dominates in him. The spectator, become hostile, is satisfied ; he experiences the same pleasure in seeing folly and egotism crushed, as he does in seeing an expansion of goodness and strength ; the banishment of an evil is worth a triumph of the good. This is the great resource of comedians,

but novelists likewise make use of it; and you may see its success not merely in the *Précieuses*, the "Ecole des Femmes," the "Femmes Savantes," and numerous other pieces by Molière, but again in the "Tom Jones" of Fielding, Dickens' "Martin Chuzzlewit," and in the "Vieille Fille" by Balzac. The spectacle, nevertheless, of these belittled or crippled spirits ends by leaving in the reader's mind a vague sentiment of weariness and disgust, and even irritation and bitterness. When they are very numerous in a work, and occupy the prominent place, one is disheartened. Sterne, Swift, and the comic writers of the Restoration, many contemporary comedies and romances, the scenes of Henri Monnier, finally repel you; the admiration or approval of the reader gets to be mingled with repugnance; it is disagreeable to see vermin even when we kill it, and we demand that we be shown creations of a more vigorous birth and of loftier character.

At this point of the scale is placed a family of powerful but incomplete types, and generally

wanting in balance. Some passion, some faculty, some disposition or other of mind or of character is developed in them with enormous accretion, like a hypertrophied organ, at the expense of the rest, amidst all sorts of ravages and misfortunes. Such is the ordinary theme of dramatic and philosophic literature ; for the personages thus moulded are the best suited to furnish the writer with affecting and terrible circumstances, with the collision and revolutions of sentiments, and the inward tribulation of which he has need for his drama ; and, on the other hand, they are the best adapted to manifest to the thinker the mechanisms of thought, the fatalities of organization, all the obscure forces which act in us without our consciousness of them, and which are the blind sovereigns of our being. You will find them among the Greek, Spanish, and French tragedians, in Lord Byron and Victor Hugo, in most of the great novelists, from Don Quixote down to Werther and Madame Bovary. All those have set forth the disproportion between man and himself, and with the

world, the dominion of some mastering passion or idea : in Greece, pride, revenge, warring rage, murderous ambition, filial vengeance, all the natural and spontaneous sentiments ; in Spain and in France, chivalric honor, exalted love, religious fervor, all the monarchical and cultivated sentiments ; and in Europe of our day, the inner malady of man discontented with himself and with society. But nowhere has this race of vehement and suffering spirits propagated itself in species more vigorous, more perfect, and more distinct than with the two great judges of man, Shakespeare and Balzac. That which they always depict from choice is some gigantic force self-destructive or destructive of another. Ten times out of twelve the principal personage is a maniac or a knave ; he is endowed with the strongest and subtlest faculties, and sometimes with the most generous and most delicate sentiments ; but through a defectiveness of inward organization, or through lack of superior direction, these forces either lead to his ruin, or unchain themselves, to the detriment of others :

either the superb engine explodes, or it injures those it encounters on its way. In enumerating the heroes of Shakespeare, Coriolanus, Hotspur, Hamlet, Lear, Timon, Leontes, Macbeth, Othello, Antony, Cleopatra, Romeo, Juliet, Desdemona, Ophelia, we find all, the most heroic and the purest, swept away either by the fury of a blind imagination, the agitations of frenzied sensibility, the tyranny of flesh and blood, mental hallucination, or the irresistible flood of rage or of love, to which must be added the perverted and carnivorous souls who spring like lions on the human flock, Iago, Richard III., and Lady Macbeth, all those who have expelled from their veins the last drop of "the milk of human kindness;" and you will find in Balzac the two corresponding groups of figures, on the one hand the monomaniacs Hulot, Claës, Goriot, Cousin Pons, Louis Lambert, Grandet, Gobseck, Sarrazine, Frauenhofer, Gambara, collectors, lovers, artists, and misers; and on the other, the beasts of prey Nucingen, Vautrin, du Tillet, Philippe Bridau, Rastignac, du Marsay, and the Marneffes,

male and female, usurers, sharpers, courtezans, business-men, and ambitious characters, powerful and monstrous specimens throughout, generated from the same ideas as those of Shakespeare, but brought forth in greater travail in an atmosphere breathed and vitiated by more human generations, with a less youthful blood, and with every deformity, every disease, and every blemish of an older civilization. These, among literary works, are the most profound; they manifest better than others the important characters, the elementary forces, the deepest strata of human nature. In reading them we experience a kind of grandiose emotion, that of a man let into the secret of things, admitted to the contemplation of the laws which govern the soul, society, and history. Notwithstanding this, they leave on the mind a painful impression; we behold too much misery and too many crimes; the passions developed and in mortal encounter display too great ravages. Before opening the book we contemplated things on their outside, tranquilly and mechanically, like a worthy citizen

gazing on a customary and monotonous parade of troops. The writer has taken our hand and conducted us to the battle-field; we see the shock of armies beneath murderous volleys of musketry, and the soil is strewn with their dead.

Advancing a step further, we encounter complete personages; true heroes. We find many such in the dramatic and philosophic literature of which I have just spoken to you. Shakespeare and his contemporaries have multiplied perfect images of feminine innocence, goodness, virtue, and delicacy; down through every successive age their conceptions have reappeared under diverse forms in English romance and drama, the latest of the descendants of *Miranda* and *Imogen* being found in the *Esthers* and the *Agnes* of Dickens. Pure and noble characters are not wanting in Balzac himself; *Margaret Claës*, *Eugénie Grandet*, the *Marquis d'Espars*, and the *Médecin de Campagne* are models. We might even find many writers in the vast range of literature who have intentionally brought on

the stage lofty characters and beautiful sentiments, such as Corneille, Richardson, and George Sand, the one in *Polyeucte*, the *Cid*, and the *Horatii*, in representing dialectic heroism ; the other in *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and *Grandison*, in giving voice to protestant virtue ; the other in *Mauprat*, *François le Champi*, the *Mare au Diable*, *Jean de la Roche*, and so many other recent works, in depicting native generosity. Sometimes, finally, a superior artist like Goethe in his *Hermann and Dorothea*, and especially in his *Iphigenia*, Tennyson in the *Idyls of the King* and in the *Princess*, have attempted to aspire to the highest point of the ideal. But while we have fallen from it, they return to it only through the curiosity of artists, the abstractions of recluses, and the researches of archæologists. As to the rest, when they bring perfect personages on the stage, it is at one time as moralists and at another as observers. In the former case, in order to sustain a thesis with an evident tinge of coldness or of predilection ; in the latter case, with a commingling of human traits, radical imper-



fections, local prejudices, and ancient, proximate, or possible errors, which brings the ideal near to the real figure, but which tarnishes the splendor of its beauty. The atmosphere of advanced civilizations is not congenial to it; it appears elsewhere, in epic and in popular literature, when inexperience and ignorance allow the imagination its full flight. There is an epoch for each of the three groups of types, and for each of the three groups of literary productions; they are originated, the one at the decline, the other during the maturity, and the other in the first stage of a civilization. At highly cultivated and very refined epochs, in nations somewhat decrepit, in the age of *hetairæ*, in Greece, in the saloons of Louis XIV., and in our own, appear the lowest and the truest types, a comic and realistic literature. At mature epochs, when society is at its full development, when man stands midway in some grand career, in Greece in the fifth century (B. C.), in Spain and in England at the end of the sixteenth, in France in the seventeenth century and to-day, appear the robust

and enduring types, a dramatic and philosophic literature. In the intermediary epochs, which are on the one side a maturity and on the other a decline—the present day, for example—the two ages commingle through a reciprocal encroachment, and each of them engenders the creations of the other, together with its own. But creations truly ideal are fertile only in primitive and simple epochs; and it is always at remote ages, at the origin of peoples, amidst the dreams of human infancy, that we must ascend in order to find heroes and gods. Each people has its own; it has brought them forth from its own heart, it nourishes them with its own legends, and, in proportion as it advances into the unexplored solitude of new ages and of future history, their immortal images shine before its eyes like so many beneficent genii appointed to conduct and protect it. Such are the heroes of the genuine epics—Siegfried in the “*Nibelungen*,” Roland in our old *chansons de geste*,” the Cid in the “*Romancero*,” Rostan in the “*Livre des Rois*,” Antar in Arabia, Ulysses and Achilles in

Greece. Farther up, and in a higher sphere, are the revelators, saviors, and gods, those of Greece depicted in the Homeric poems, those of India dimly visible in the Vedic hymns, in the epics of antiquity, in Buddhist legends, those of Judea and of Christianity represented in the Psalms, in the Gospel, in the Apocalypse, and in that continuous chain of poetic confessions of which the last and the purest links are the "Fioretti" and the "Imitation." There, man transfigured and ennobled, attains all his plenitude; deified or divine he lacks nothing. If his mind, his strength, or his goodness have limits, it is in our eyes and from our point of view. They do not exist in the eyes of his race and of his age; whatever the imagination had conceived, faith imparted to him; he is at the zenith, and, all abreast of him at the zenith of works of art, are placed sublime and genuine works which have borne his idea without bending under its weight.

## III.

Let us now consider the physical man with the arts which portray him, and seek what are for him beneficent characters. The first of all, without doubt, is perfect health, even exuberant health. A suffering, emaciated, languid, attenuated body is more feeble; that which we call the living animal is a mass of organs with a mass of functions: every partial arrest is a step toward total arrest; illness is incipient destruction, an approach to death.—For the same reason it is necessary to class the integrity of the natural type among beneficent characters, and this remark leads us very far toward the conception of a perfect body. For it not only excludes from it gross deformities, deviations of the spine and of the limbs, and all of the vile which a pathological museum can present, but also the slight changes a trade, a profession, and social life can introduce into the inward and outward relations of

the individual. A blacksmith has arms too long · a stonecutter has the spine curved; a pianist has hands furrowed with tendons and veins, lengthened to excess and terminating by flattened fingers; a lawyer, a physician, an official and a business man bears in his relaxed muscles and on his drawn visage the universal stamp of his cerebral and sedentary life. The effects of costume, and especially of modern costume, are not less injurious; it is only a loose floating vestment, easily and often abandoned, the sandal, the chlamys, the antique peplum, which does not incommode the natural body. Our shoes squeeze together the toes of the foot which are hollowed out on their sides by the contact; the corsets and boddices of our women contract their shape. Observe men bathing in summer, and enumerate the many melancholy or grotesque deformities, among others the crude and pallid color of the skin; it has lost its adaptability to light, its tissue is no longer firm; it shivers and roughens at the slightest breath of air; it is exiled, and is no longer in harmony with sur-

rounding objects ; it differs as much from healthy flesh as a stone recently taken from a quarry differs from a rock a long time exposed to rain and sunshine : both have lost their natural tone and are disinterments. Follow out this principle to the end : by dint of discarding all the changes which civilization imposes on the natural body you will see appear the primary lineaments of the perfect body.

Now let us see it at work. Its motion and action are one. We will enumerate then all its capacities of physical motion as beneficial attributes ; it is necessary that it should be apt and ready for all the exercises and uses of force, to have the framework, the proportions of members, the fulness of chest, the suppleness of articulations and muscular resistance necessary to run, jump, carry, strike, combat, and resist effort and fatigue. We will give it all these corporeal perfections without making the one detrimental to the other ; they shall all exist in it in the highest degree, but balanced and harmonious : it is not necessary that force should imply weak-

ness and that in order to be developed it should be diminished. This is not yet all. To athletic aptitudes and to gymnastic preparation we shall add a soul, that is to say, a will, intelligence, and a heart. The moral being is the term and the flower, as it were, of the physical animal: if the former were lacking the latter would not be complete; the plant would seem a failure, it would not have its supreme crown, and a body so perfect is not finished except by a perfect soul.\* We shall show this soul in all the economy of the body, in attitude, in the form of the head, in the expression of the countenance; we shall feel that it is free and healthy, or superior and grand. We shall divine its intelligence, its energy and its nobleness; but we shall do no more than divine them. We shall indicate them, we shall not put them forth prominently: we cannot put them

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\* *Ψυχὴ ἐντελεχεῖα σώματος φυσικοῦ οργανίχου.*—

This definition of Aristotle, so profound, might have been written by all the Grecian sculptors; it is the mother-idea of Hellenic civilization.

forth prominently ; if we attempted it we should injure the perfect body that we desire to represent. For spiritual life in man is opposed to corporeal life ; when he is superior in the former he is inferior or subordinate in the latter ; he regards himself as a soul embarrassed with a body, his frame becomes an accessory ; in order to think more freely he sacrifices it, he shuts it up in a workshop, he lets it shrivel or become relaxed ; he is even ashamed of it, his excessive modesty covers it up and he conceals it almost entirely ; he ceases to recognize it, he no longer sees but the thinking or the expressive organs, the skull-coating of the brain, the physiognomical interpreter of the emotions ; the rest is an appendage hidden by the robe or by the coat. High civilization, complete development, profound elaboration of the soul cannot be in keeping with an athletic, naked body skilled in gymnastics. The meditative brow, delicacy of feature, the wrinkled physiognomy would be out of place with the members of a wrestler and athlete. For this reason when we would imagine a perfect



body we should take man at this epoch and in this intermediary situation, where the soul has not yet relegated the body to a secondary place, where thought is a function and not a tyranny, where the mind is not yet a disproportionate and monstrous organ, where a balance is maintained among all the parts of human activity, where life flows ample and moderate, like a beautiful stream, between the inadequacy of the past and the outbursts of the future.

#### IV.

According to this order of physical values, we may class the works of art which represent the physical man, and show that, all things being equal in other respects, the works will be more or less beautiful according as they shall more or less completely express the characters whose presence is a benefit to the body.

At the lowest step is found the art which,

intentionally, suppresses them all. It begins with the fall of ancient paganism, and lasts until the Renaissance. From the epoch of Commodus and of Diocletian you see sculpture profoundly deteriorated; imperial and consular busts lose their serenity and their nobleness; surliness, agitation and languor, bloated cheeks and elongated necks, individual convulsiveness and the wear and tear of the occupation replace harmonious health and energetic activity. You arrive gradually at the mosaics and the paintings of Byzantine art; at the emaciated, lank, and stiffened Christs and *Panagia*, mere manikins, oftentimes veritable skeletons, whose cavernous eyes, large white corneas, thin lips, meager face, low brow, spare and inert hands give the impression of a consumptive and idiotic ascetic. In a lesser degree the same malady prevails throughout the art of the middle ages; on looking at the stained-glass, the statues in cathedrals and at primitive paintings, it seems as if the human race had degenerated, and that human blood

had become impoverished; consumptive saints, dislocated martyrs, flat-breasted virgins with too long feet and knotty hands, dried-up recluses empty of all substance, Christs which seem crushed and bloody annelides, processions of dull, hardened, and gloomy people, on whom are impressed all the deformities of misery and all the constraints of oppression. When, on drawing near to the Renaissance, the human plant, utterly emaciated and distorted, begins again to vegetate, it does not immediately recover itself; its sap is not yet pure. Health and energy do not re-enter the human body except by degrees; it requires a century in order to cure it of its inveterate scrofula.

Among the masters of the fifteenth century you still find numerous signs which denote the ancient consumption and the immemorial fast: in Hemling, at the Bruges hospital, faces quite out of the monastic pale, heads too big, brows bulging out through the exaggerations of mystic reverie, meager arms, the monotonous pla-

idity of a passive life preserved like a pale flower in the shade of the cloister; in Fra Angelico attenuated bodies hidden beneath radiant copes and robes, reduced to the condition of beatified phantoms, no breasts, elongated heads and protuberant brows; in Albert Durer thighs and arms too thin, bellies too large, ungraceful feet, anxious, wrinkled and worn countenances, pale and wan Adams and Eves, all chilly and benumbed, to whom one would like to give clothes; among almost all, this form of the skull which recalls the fakirs or the hydrocephalous, and those hideous infants, scarcely viable, a species of tadpole, whose enormous head is prolonged by a flabby body, and then by a slender appendage of wriggled and twisted members. The early masters of the Italian Renaissance, the true restorers of ancient paganism, the Florentine anatomists Antonio Pollaiuolo, Verocchio, Luca Signorelli, all the predecessors of Leonardo da Vinci, themselves retain a remnant of the original blemish: in their figures the vulgarity

of the heads, the ugliness of the feet, the projections of the knees and of the clavicles, the ridges of the muscles, the painful and contorted attitude, all show that strength and health, restored to their throne, have not brought back with them all their companions, and that they are still wanting in two muses, those of ease and serenity. When, at length, the goddesses of antique beauty, all recalled from exile, resume over art their legitimate sway, they are found sovereign only in Italy; in the North their authority is intermittent or incomplete. The Germanic nations only half recognize it; still is it necessary, as in Flanders, that they should be Catholics; the Protestants, as in Holland, free themselves from it altogether. The latter better appreciate truth than beauty; they prefer important characters to beneficent characters, the life of the spirit to the life of the body, the depths of individual personality to the regularity of the general type, the intense and disturbed dream to clear and harmonious contemplation, the

poesy of inward sentiment to the exterior delight of the senses. Rembrandt, the greatest painter of this race, has recoiled from no physical ugliness and deformity: begrimed visages of Jews and usurers, the crooked spines and bandy legs of beggars and cripples, slovenly cooks whose gross flesh still shows marks of the corset, bowed knees and flabby bellies, hospital subjects and shreds and tatters, Hebrew incidents which seem copied in a Rotterdam hovel, scenes of temptation where Potiphar's wife, jumping out of bed, makes the spectator comprehend Joseph's flight; bold and painful grasp of the naked reality however repulsive. Such painting, when it is successful, goes beyond painting; like that of Fra Angelico, Albert Durer and Hemling, it is a poesy; the object of the artist is to manifest a religious emotion, philosophic divinations, a general conception of life; the human form, the proper object of the plastic arts, is sacrificed; it is subordinated to an idea or to some other element of art. In-

deed, with Rembrandt, the chief interest of the picture is not man, but the tragedy of expiring, diffused, palpitating light incessantly competing with invading shadow. But if, quitting these extraordinary or eccentric geniuses, we consider the human body as the true object of picturesque imitation we must recognize that the painted or sculptured figures which lack force, health, and the rest of corporeal perfections, descend, taken in themselves, to the lowest degree of art.

Around Rembrandt is a group of painters of inferior genius, and who are called the minor Flemings, Ostade, Teniers, Gerard Dow, Adrien Brouwer, Jans Steen, De Hoogh, Terburg, Metzger and many others. Their personages, ordinarily, consist of the *bourgeois* or the lower class of people; they have taken them just as they saw them in the markets and in the streets, in houses and in taverns; fat, well-to-do burgomasters, respectable lymphatic ladies, spectacled schoolmasters, busy cooks, corpulent innkeepers, merry tipplers, clowns,

perfection of style not true. They are not depicted as they are.

boors and bumpkins of the stable and the farm, the shop and the tavern. Louis XIV. seeing them in his gallery exclaimed, "Take away those low fellows!" The personage, in short, they depicted is a body of an inferior species, cool in blood, wan and of reddish hue, diminutive in figure with irregular, vulgar, and often coarse features, fitted for a sedentary and mechanical life and wanting in that suppleness and activity which belong to the athlete and the runner. They have, moreover, left to it all the servilities of social life, every mark of the calling, condition and dress, every deformity which the mechanical occupation of the peasant and ceremonial restraint of the bourgeois impose on physical structure and on the expression of the face. Their work, however, is redeemed by other qualities: one that we have examined above, that is to say, the representation of the important characters, and the art of manifesting the essential of a race and of an epoch; the other, which we shall examine by-and-by, namely, harmony of color and skill



in composition. Apart from this, considered in themselves, their personages give pleasure to the eye; they are not over-excited and intellectually morbid, or suffering and stricken like the preceding class; they are in good condition and contented with life; they are comfortable in their homes and hovels; a pipe and a glass of beer are sufficient to make them happy; they are not agitated and not restless; they laugh heartily or look before them without wishing more. Bourgeois and gentlemen, they are happy to know that their clothes are new, that their floors are well waxed, and that their window-panes are clean. Domestics, peasants, shoemakers, and even mendicants, their cabins appear comfortable to them and they are contented seated on a stool; we see that they take pleasure in punching with their awls or in scraping their carrots. Their obtuse senses and their cold imagination do not carry them beyond their entire countenance is calm or refreshed, simple or fatherly: such is the happiness of the phlegmatic temperament, and happiness, that is

to say moral and physical health, is beauty everywhere and even here.

We come now, at length, to grandiose figures in which the human animal attains to his full force and stature. Such are those of the Antwerp masters, Crayer, Gerard Seghers, Van Oost, Everdingen, Van Thulden, Abraham Janssens, Theodore Rombouts, Jordaens and Rubens in the first rank. Here we see bodies free of all social constraint, with which there is not and has not been any interference; they are either nude or carelessly draped; if they are clothed it is with fantastic and magnificent costumes which are for their members not an obstruction but a decoration. Nowhere have freer attitudes, more impetuous action, more vigorous and ampler muscles been found. Rubens' martyrs are furious giants and rampant wrestlers. The torsos and thighs of his female saints are those of fauns and bacchantes. The fuming wine of health and joyousness circulates impetuously in their overfed bodies; it overflows like superabundant sap in splendid carnations, in unre-

strained gestures, in colossal gayeties, in the superb fury of excitement; the ruddy stream of blood which comes and goes in their veins darts life through them with a jet so opulent and so free that every other human creature seems fettered and colorless. It is an ideal world, and when we perceive it there is given us, as it were, a great sweep of wing which bears us away above our own. But it is not the highest of all. There the appetites are sovereign, there one scarcely goes beyond the vulgar life of the stomach and of the senses. There desire fires the eye with too fierce a flame; the sensual smile dwells too constantly on the lascivious lips; the gross body, voluptuously rounded, is not adapted to every diversity of virile activity; it is only capable of a bestial impulse and gluttonous satiety: the flesh, too sanguine and too soft, runs over into exaggerated and irregular forms; man is cut out on a grand scale but with rough strokes. He is narrow, violent, and often cynical and scurrilous: high qualities of

intellect are wanting in him, he is not noble. Hercules here is not a hero but an ox-killer. Having the muscularity of a bull he possesses the spirit of one ; and man, such as Rubens conceived him, seems a flourishing brute whose instincts condemn him to the repletion of the pasture or to the fury of combat.

It remains for us to find a human type in which moral nobility completes physical perfection. For this purpose we will quit Flanders and betake ourselves to the land of the beautiful. We will traverse the Italian Low Countries, I mean Venice, and see in its painting an approach to the perfect type : amplitude of flesh, but confined to a form more refined ; widespread joyousness, but of a finer nature ; broad and undisguised voluptuousness, but exquisite and lustrous ; vigorous heads and souls bound up with present life, but with intelligent countenances, reflective and dignified physiognomies, honest and aristocratic minds. We will then go to Florence and contemplate that school from which issued Leonardo da Vinci, into which

Raphael entered, and who, with Ghiberti, Donatello, Andrea del Sarto, Fra Bartolomeo and Michael Angelo, discovered the most perfect type to which modern art has attained. Contemplate the "St. Vincent" of Fra Bartolomeo, the "Madonna of the Sack" of Andrea del Sarto, Raphael's "School of Athens," the Medici Monument, and the arch of the Sistine Chapel by Michael Angelo: behold bodies as they ought to be; in the presence of this race of men, others are either weak, effeminate, gross or badly balanced. Not only have their figures the firm and vigorous health which invincibly resists the attacks of life; not only are they exempt from every blemish and from every constraint which the exigences of human society and the conflict with the surrounding world bring to us; not only do rhythm of structure and freedom of attitude manifest in them every faculty of activity and of movement; but again, their heads, their features, the totality of all their forms attest at one time, as in Michael Angelo, the energy and the sublimity of the will

at another, as in Raphael, the immortal sweetness and repose of the soul ; at another, as with Leonardo da Vinci, the elevation and exquisite refinement of the intelligence without, however, in either case, the extreme subtlety of moral expression being in contrast with the nudity of the body or with the perfection of limb, without the too great ascendancy of the thought or of the organs withdrawing the human being from that ideal heaven where all powers accord in greater harmony. Their personages may strive and wax wroth like the heroes of Michael Angelo, or meditate and smile like the women of Da Vinci, or live and be happy in living like the Madonnas of Raphael ; the great point is not the momentary action in which they are engaged, but their entire structure. The head is only a portion of it ; the breast, arms, joints and proportions, the entire form speaks and conspires to place before our eyes a creature of another species than our own ; before them we are as monkeys or as the Papuans before ourselves. We cannot place them at any positive point of

history in order to find them a world; we are obliged to relegate them to the sequestered recesses of legend. The poesy of distance or the majesty of theogonies can alone furnish a soil worthy to nourish them. Before Raphael's Sibyls and Virtues, before Michael Angelo's Adams and Eves, we think of the heroic or serene figures of primitive humanity, of the virgin daughters of the earth and of the streams whose great eyes first reflected the azure of the paternal sky, of the naked combatants who descended from their mountain fastnesses to strangle lions in their arms. In withdrawing from such a spectacle we believe that our work is done, and that we cannot go beyond. And yet Florence is only the second patrimony of the beautiful; Athens is the first. A few heads and statues that have escaped the wreck of antiquity, the "Venus of Milo," the Parthenon marbles, the bust of Juno Queen, in the villa Ludovisi, will show you a still loftier and purer race you will dare to recognize, by comparison, that in Raphael's figures sweetness is often somewhat

too placid, and that the square-set bodies are often a little too massive,\* that in Michael Angelo's figures the soul-tragedy is too visibly announced by over-swollen muscles and an excess of effort. The true visible gods are born elsewhere and in a purer atmosphere.† A simpler and more spontaneous civilization, a better balanced and finer race, a better adapted religion, a better understood culture of the body formerly set apart a nobler type of a more tranquil bearing, of a more august serenity, of a more uniform and freer action, and of a more facile and more natural excellence; it has served as model to the Renaissance artists, and the art which we admire in Italy is but a shoot, less upright and less lofty, of the Ionian laurel transplanted to another soil.

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\* The Dresden "Madonna de San Sisto" and "La Belle Jardinière."

† The Venuses, Psyches, Graces, Jupiters and Cupids of the Farnesini palace.



## V.

Such is the double scale according to which the characters of objects and the values of works of art are simultaneously classified. According as characters are more important or beneficent they hold a higher place and raise to a higher rank the works of art by which they are expressed. Note that importance and beneficence are two phases of a single quality, namely, *force*, considered in turn in relation to others and to itself. In the first case it is more or less important according as it resists greater or lesser forces. In the second case it is baneful or beneficent according as it borders on its own weakness or on its own extension. These two points of view are the most elevated from which nature can be considered, seeing that they turn our eye at one time toward its essence, at another toward its direction. In its essence it is a mass of brute forces un-

equal in magnitude, whose conflict is eternal, but whereof the whole sum and labor ever remain the same. In its direction it is a series of forms wherein the husbanded force has the prerogative of a continuous renovation, and even of an augmentation. At one time character is one of these primitive and mechanical forces constituting the essence of things; at another it is one of those ulterior forces capable of augmentation marking the direction of the world; and we comprehend why art is superior when, taking nature for its object, it manifests at one time some profound portion of its inner depths, and at another some leading epoch of its development.

### **§ 3.**

#### **THE CONVERGING DEGREE OF EFFECTS**



After having considered characters in themselves it remains for us to examine them when incorporated in a work of art. Not only is it necessary that in themselves they should have the greatest possible value but likewise is it necessary that in a work of art they should become as paramount as possible. It is in this way that they become more manifest and hold a more prominent place ; in this way only will they become more apparent than in nature. To this end it is evidently necessary that all parts of a work should contribute to their manifestation. No element should remain passive or divert the attention in another direction ; it would be a force wasted or a force employed in a counter sense. In other words, in a picture, in a statue, in a poem, in an edifice, and in a symphony all the effects should converge to one point. The degree of this convergence marks the place of the work, and you will see a third scale erected alongside of the two first to measure the value of works of art.

## I.

Let us at first take the arts which disclose the moral man, and above all literature. We will begin by distinguishing the diverse elements which constitute a drama, an epic or a romance, in brief a work which places before us acting agents. In the first place there are agents in it, that is to say personages endowed, all of them, with a distinct character; and in a character we may recognize many parts. From the moment, says Homer, "an infant first falls on the knees of a woman," he possesses, at least in germ, faculties and instincts of a certain kind and to a certain degree; he is a compound of his father, of his mother, of his family and, in general, of his race; furthermore, inherited qualities, transmitted through the blood, take in him dimensions and proportions by which he is distinguished from his compatriots and from his relatives. This innate moral foundation is allied

to a physical temperament, and the whole together forms the primitive combination which education, example, training, all subsequent events and actions of infancy and of youth are to oppose or to complete. When these different forces, instead of neutralizing, re-enforce each other, this convergence of forces stamps itself deeply on man, and there appear strong and striking characters. This convergence is often wanting in nature ; it never fails in the work of great artists : it is thus that their characters, although composed of the same elements as real characters are more powerful than real characters. They prepare their personages minutely and remotely ; when they are presented to us we feel that they cannot be otherwise than they are. A vast framework supports them ; a profound logic has built them up. Nobody has possessed this gift to the same extent as Shakespeare. If you attentively read each of his parts you will find at every step, in a word, in a gesture, in an outburst of the imagination, in a desultory flow of ideas, in the turn of a phrase,

an echo and an index revealing to you the inward state, the entire past and the future of the personage before you.\*

These are his *substrata*. Organic temperament, original or acquired aptitudes and tendencies, the complex growth of ideas and of remote or recent habits, all the sap of human nature infinitely transformed from its most primitive roots to its latest offshoots have contributed to produce the actions

\* Othello, in his last moments, recurring to his travels and his infancy, a phenomenon frequent enough in suicides,

. . . . . of one whose hand,  
Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away]  
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes  
Albeit unused to the melting mood,  
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees  
Their medicinal gum

In Macbeth the sudden invasion at the first word of his homicidal and ambitious hallucination, a phenomenon frequent with monomaniacs:

My thought whose murder yet is but fantastical  
Shakes so my single state of man, that function  
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is  
But what is not.



and the expressions which form their terminal jet. This multitude of present forces and this concordance of concentrated effects were necessary in order to animate figures like Coriolanus, Macbeth, Hamlet, and Othello, and to form, nourish, and exalt the master-passion which is to nerve and to usher them forth. With Shakespeare may I name a modern, almost a contemporary, Balzac, the most gifted of all those who in our time have minted the treasures of our moral nature. No one has better shown the formation of man, the successive stages of his varied stratifications, the superposed and intersecting effects of relationship, of early impressions, of conversation, of studies, of friendships, of professions, of habitation, of the innumerable imprints which day after day come and stamp themselves on our soul in order to give to it its consistency and its form. He, however, is a novelist and a savant instead of being, like Shakespeare, a poet and dramatist; hence, instead of concealing his substrata he displays them; you will find them extensively enumerated

in his infinite descriptions and dissertations, in his circumstantial portraits of a house, of a face, or of a costume, in his preparatory accounts of an infancy or an education, and in his technical explanations of an invention or of a process. But his art, substantially, is the same, and when he builds up personages, such as Hulot, Père Grandet, Philippe Brideau, the old maid, a spy, a courtesan, a great business-man, his talent always consists in accumulating an enormous quantity of formative elements and moral influences into one channel and in one direction, like so many streams which swell and precipitate the same current.

A second group of elements in the literary work consists of situations and events. The character conceived, it is necessary that the conflict to which it is subjected should be suitable for its manifestation. In this respect, art, again, is superior to nature, for, in nature things do not always thus transpire. Some great and imposing character remains there buried and inert for lack either of opportunity or of temptation. If Crom-

well had not happened to be in the midst of the English Revolution he would probably have kept up the same life he led for forty years in his own family and district, that of a rural proprietor, town-magistrate, and rigid puritan solely concerned with his manures, his animals, his children, and his scruples of conscience. Postpone the French Revolution three years and Mirabeau would have been only a gentleman without social position, an adventurer, and man of pleasure. On the other hand, a mediocre or feeble character who was not equal to tragic events might have been equal to ordinary events. Suppose Louis XVI. to have been born in a middle-class family, and to have been an employé or a proprietor with a moderate fortune: he might have lived tranquilly and highly esteemed; he might have honestly fulfilled his daily task; we might have seen him attentive to his business, gentle with his wife, a good father to his children; in the evening by his fireside he might have taught them geography, and on Sunday, after the service, he would have amused them

with his locksmith's tools. The organized being whom nature subjects to the struggle for existence is like a ship which has just glided from the stocks into the water; it requires a strong wind or a light breeze according as it is either a frigate or a skiff; the gale which impels the frigate founders the skiff, and the light breeze which makes the skiff dance lets the frigate remain motionless in port. It is accordingly necessary that the artist should adapt his situations to his characters. You have here a second concordance and there is no necessity to show you that great artists never fail to establish it. What we call intrigue or action among them is simply a series of events and an order of situations arranged with a view to manifest characters, to probe natures to their depths, to bring up to the surface profound instincts and unknown faculties which the monotonous current of habit prevents from emerging into day, in order to measure, as in Corneille, the force of their will and the grandeur of their heroism, in order to expose, as in Shakespeare, the lusts, madness, and fury, the

strange devouring monsters which blindly rage and roar in the depths of our hearts. These experiences are varied relatively to the same personage ; they can accordingly be so disposed as to always render them effective : this is the *crescendo* of all writers ; they make use of it in each petty action as in the entire conception, and thus culminate in some supreme victory or in some supreme defeat. You perceive that the law is as applicable in the details as in the masses. Portions of a scene are grouped together in view of a certain effect ; all effects are combined in view of a *dénouement* ; the entire story is constructed in view of the natures which we wish to bring upon the stage. The noteworthy class and the visible character are due to the qualities which converge or persist in them ; this convergence of the entire character and of its successive situations manifests the essence of the character, and even its elements in drawing it out to a definite success or to a final overthrow.\*

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\* See "La Fontaine et ses Fables," by H. Taine, 8d part, for the principle of convergences.

One last element remains, that of style. It is in fact, the sole apparent one; the other two are simply its *substrata*; it is a dress for them and it appears only on the surface. A book is merely a set of phrases which the author utters or makes his personages utter; our exterior eyes and ears lay hold of nothing more, and whatever else is perceived by hearing and sight is conveyed to them only through the medium of these same phrases. Hence there is a third element of superior importance, the effect of which must accord with the effect of others in order that the total impression may be the greatest possible. But a phrase taken in itself is capable of diverse forms and, consequently, of diverse effects. It may be one verse followed by other verses; it may comprise several verses of equal or of unequal length, of rhythms and rhymes diversely arranged, enabling you to appreciate the full wealth of metre. On the other hand, it may form one line of prose followed by other lines of prose; and these lines are at one time linked together in a period, at another are cut up into

little isolated phrases, at another they are composed in turn of short periods and phrases, enabling you to perceive the full wealth of syntax.—Finally the words which compose the phrases have a character of their own; according to their origin and their ordinary use they are noble and generous, or dry and technical, or familiar and striking, or abstract and dull, or brilliant and picturesque. In short, a phrase uttered is a combination of forces which at once awaken in the reader the logical instinct, the musical aptitude, the acquisitions of memory, and the fires of the imagination, and thrills the whole man through the nerves, the senses, and the habits. It is necessary therefore that the style should be in keeping with the rest of the work; there is therein a final convergence, and on this domain the art of the great writers is without limit; their tact is of extraordinary delicacy and their invention is of inexhaustible fertility: we do not find in them a rhythm, a turn, a construction, a word, a sound or a combination of words, sounds, and phrases whose value



is not felt and whose use is not intentional. Here again art is superior to nature; for through this choice, this transformation, and this use of style the imaginary personage speaks better and more conformably to his character than the real personage. Without here entering into the subtleties of art, and without going into the detail of processes, we easily perceive that verse is a sort of song and prose a sort of conversation that the stately alexandrine line raises the voice up to a sustained and noble accent, and that the short lyrical strophe is still more musical and still more exalted; that the clear short phrase has the imperious or tripping tone; that the long period has the oratorical inspiration and the majestic emphasis; in short, that every form of style determines a state of the soul, either expansion or tension, transport or indifference, order or disorder, and that therefore the effects of situations and of characters are diminished or heightened according as the effects of style follow in the contrary sense or in the same sense. Suppose that Racine should adopt the style of



Shakespeare, and Shakespeare that of Racine, their work would be absurd or rather they would not be able to write ; the seventeenth century phrase, so clear, so well-proportioned, so purified, so well put together, so well adapted to a palace discourse is incapable of expressing the crude passions, and imaginative sallies, the inward and irresistible tempest which vents itself in the English drama. On the other hand, the sixteenth century phrase, at one time familiar and at another lyrical, venturesome, harsh and disjointed would be a blemish if put in the mouths of the polished, well-educated, and accomplished personages of French tragedy. Instead of a Racine and a Shakespeare you would have Drydens and Otways and a Ducis and Casimir Delavigne. Such is the power and such the conditions of style. The characters which situations unfold to the mind are manifested to the senses only through language, and the convergence of the three forces gives to the character all its prominence. The more the artist has discriminated and made converge in his work

numerous elements and capable of effect, the more the character which he wishes to place in light becomes prominent. The whole of art lies in two words, *concentration in manifestation.*

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## II.

According to this principle we may class once more various literary works. All things equal in other respects, they will be more or less beautiful according to the greater or less completeness of the convergence of effects in them ; and, through a singular coincidence, this rule applied to the schools, establishes, between the successive stages of the same art, the divisions which history and experience have already introduced into them.

At the commencement of every literary age we remark a period of gestation ; art is weak and infantile ; it is because the convergence of effects is insufficient there, and the fault is due

to the ignorance of the writer. He is not wanting in inspiration ; he has it and often in a natural and vigorous way ; talent abounds at this moment ; noble forms flit obscurely through the depths of the soul ; but processes are not known ; people do not know how to write, how to distribute the parts of a subject, how to employ literary resources. Such is the defect of early French literature in the middle-ages. In reading the "Chanson de Roland," "Renaud de Montauban," "Ogier le Danois," you quickly perceive that the men of this age entertained grand and original sentiments ; a new society had been organized ; the crusades were in progress ; the proud independence of the baron, the indomitable fidelity of the vassal, military and heroic habits, strength of body and simplicity of heart provided poesy with characters equal to those of Homer. It only half profited by them ; it has felt their beauty without being able to render it. The *trouvère* was laic and French, that is to say, born of a race ever prosaic and at that day so situated as to be deprived of

superior culture by clerical monopoly. He narrates in a dry and coarse manner; he has not the broad and brilliant imagery of Homer and of antique Greece; his story is tame; his monorhythmic stanza repeats thirty times in succession the same monotonous stroke of the bell. He is not master of his subject; he does not know how to curtail, develop and proportion, to prepare a scene and strengthen an effect. His work takes no place in the literature of all time; it disappears from the world, and only engages the attention of antiquaries. If it is successful it is through isolated works, through a "Niebelungen" in Germany, where the old national foundation has not been upturned by the ecclesiastical establishment; through the "Divine Comedy" in Italy, where Dante, by a supreme effort of labor, enthusiasm and genius finds, in a mystic and learned poem, the unlooked-for union of lay sentiments and theological theories. When art revives in the sixteenth century other examples show us the same want of convergence, resulting, at first, in the same insufficiency. Mar-

low, the early English dramatist, is a man of genius ; he felt, like Shakespeare, the fury of violent passions, the sombre grandeur of northern melancholy, the tragic poesy of contemporary history ; but he did not know how to manage dialogue, vary circumstances, graduate situations and contrast characters ; his process is only continuous murder and speechless death ; his drama is powerful, but rusted out, and only known to the curious. In order that his tragic conception of life may bloom out before all eyes and in full daylight, it is necessary that a greater genius after him, furnished with accumulated experience, should brood a second time over the same spirits ; it is necessary that Shakespeare, after having himself groped his way more than once, should imbue the crude sketches of his precursor with the varied, full and profound life for which primitive art had proved inadequate.

On the other hand, at the end of every literary era we remark a period of decadence ; art here becomes corrupt, worn out, and stiffened through

routine and conventionalism. Here also the convergence of effects is wanting, but the fault is not due to ignorance. On the contrary, people have never been so cultivated ; all methods have been perfected and refined ; they have even become common property ; whoever desires to make use of them can avail himself of them. The language of poetry is complete ; the feeblest writer knows how a phrase is constructed, how rhymes are coupled together, and how to bring about a catastrophe. It is feeble sentiment which lowers art. The great conception which formed and sustained the works of the masters, droops and perishes ; it is preserved only through reminiscences and tradition. It is no longer pursued to the end ; changes are effected in it by introducing into it another spirit ; it is supposed to be perfected by incongruities. Such was the situation of the Grecian drama in the time of Euripides, and of the French drama in the time of Voltaire. The outward form remained the same as before ; but the spirit that animated it was transformed, and the contrast is

disagreeable. Euripides retains the accessories, the choruses, the metre and the heroic and divine personages of Æschylus and of Sophocles. But he degrades them down to the level of the sentiments and the plottings of ordinary life; he makes them discourse like lawyers and sophists; he delights in exposing their misfortunes, weaknesses and lamentations. Voltaire accepts or takes upon himself the proprieties and the mechanism of Racine and of Corneille, the confidants, high-priests, princes and princesses, chivalric and graceful love-making, alexandrine stanzas—a recognized and noble style—dreams, oracles and divinities. But he adds an exciting intrigue borrowed from the English stage; he attempts, moreover, to give it historic varnish; he forces into it philosophical and humanitarian intentions; he insinuates attacks against kings and priests; he is the innovator and the thinker out of season and out of place. With both of them the various elements of the work no longer concur to the same result. Antique drapery is foreign to modern sentiments · modern

sentiments do violence to antique drapery. The personages are nonplused between two rôles those of Voltaire are princes, enlightened by the "Encyclopedia;" those of Euripides are heroes, polished in the schools of the rhetorician. Under this double mask their figure flickers; we no longer see it; or rather, they do not live except by fits and starts, and at rare intervals. Here the reader abandons this world, which is self-destructive, and seeks works in which, according to the model of living creatures, all the parts are organs which conspire to the same result.

We find them at the central point of literary ages, at the moment when art is in flower; previously it is in germ, a little later it becomes faded. At this moment the convergence of effects is complete, and an admirable harmony equalizes amongst them characters, style and action. This moment is encountered in Greece in the times of Sophocles and, if I am not mistaken, still better in the time of Æschylus when tragedy, true to its origins, is yet a dithyrambic chant, when the religious senti-



ment of the initiated is thoroughly infused into it, when the gigantic forms of heroic or divine legend possess their full stature, when fatality, arbiter of human life, and justice, custodian of social life, spin and cut the threads of destiny, to the sounds of a poesy obscure like an oracle, terrible as a prophecy, and sublime as a vision. You may see in Racine the perfect concordance of oratorical skill, of pure and noble diction, of learned composition, of well-planned dénouement, of dramatic decorum, of princely politeness, and of the delicacies and proprieties of the court and the drawing-room. You will find a like concordance in the complex and composite work of Shakespeare if you observe that, depicting man intact and complete, he has had to employ the most poetic verses side by side with the most familiar prose, every contrast of style in order to manifest in turn the heights and the depths of human nature, the exquisite delicacy of female characters and the uncontrollable violence of men's characters, the crude coarseness of pop-

ular manners, and the over-refined polish of worldly ceremonial, the gossip of current conversation and the enthusiasm of extreme emotion, the surprises of petty vulgar occurrences and the fatality of unrestrained passions. However different the methods may be they always, with great writers, converge; they converge in the fables of La Fontaine as in the funeral orations of Bossuet, in Voltaire's tales as in the stanzas of Dante, in Byron's Don Juan as in Plato's Dialogues, among the ancients as among the moderns, among the romanticists as among the classicists. The example of the masters imposes no fixed form, style or arrangement on their successors. If one succeeds in one way, another succeeds in an opposite way; one point only is essential, which is that his whole work should move forward on the same line; it is necessary that it should direct all its forces toward a given end. Art, like nature, casts its objects in every mould; only, in order that the object be viable it is necessary, in art as in nature, that the parts should con-

stitute a whole, and that the least part of the least element should be subordinate to the whole.

### III.

It remains to us to consider the arts which manifest the physical man, and to recognize their various elements, especially those of painting, the richest of all. What we observe at first in a picture are the living bodies with which it is filled; and in these bodies we have already distinguished two principal parts: the general framework of bone and muscle, that is to say the naked muscles; and the external covering which protects them, that is to say, the impressionable and colored skin. You see at once that these two elements must be in harmony. The white and feminine skin of Correggio is not found on the heroic muscularities of Michael Angelo.—And so is it in respect to a third element, attitude and physiognomy; certain smiles comport only with certain bodies;

never does an over-fed wrestler, an ostentatious Susannah, a fleshy Magdalen of Rubens display the pensive, delicate and profound expression which Da Vinci imparts to his countenances. These are only the grosser and more outward concordances; there are others much more profound and not less necessary. All the muscle, bone, and articulations, all parts of the physical man have a significative virtue; each of them may express various characters. The great toe and the clavicle of a doctor are not those of a combatant; the least part of the body contributes through its amplitude, its form, its color, its dimensions, its consistency, to rank the human animal amongst one or the other species. There is here a large number of elements whose effects must converge; if the artist is ignorant of any of them he lessens his power; if he causes one to be contradictory he partially destroys the effect of the other. Hence it is that the Renaissance masters have so deeply studied the human body; hence it is that Michael Angelo passed

twelve years in dissecting. This was no pedantry, no minutia of literal observation. The exterior parts of the human body are the treasury of sculptor and painter as the interior parts of the human soul are the treasury of the novelist and the dramatist. The projection of a tendon is as important for one as is the prevalence of a habit for the other. Not only is it necessary that he should take it into account in order to make a viable body, but again he may take advantage of it in order to make a body energetic or attractive. The more his mind has become impressed with its form, diversities, dependencies and usage, the more masterly is his eloquent use of it in his work; and, if you closely study the figures of the great century, you will perceive that from the heel to the head, from the curve of the arched foot to the lines on the face there is no dimension, no form, no tone of flesh which does not contribute toward bringing out into relief the character which the artist desired to express.

Here do new elements present themselves, or rather the same elements are presented from another point of view. The lines which trace the bodily contour, or which, in this contour, mark depressions and projections, have a value in themselves; and, according as they are straight, curved, sinuous, broken or irregular, they produce upon us different effects. The same thing occurs with the masses composing the body; their proportions have also in themselves a significative power; according to the various relationships of size which unite the head to the trunk, the trunk to the members, the members to each other, we experience various impressions. There is an architecture of the body, and to the organic connections which tie together its living parts we must join the mathematical connections which determine the geometrical masses and its abstract contour. In this respect we may compare it to a column; a certain proportion of diameter and of height makes it Ionic or Doric, elegant or truncated. In a similar man-

ner a certain proportion between the size of the head and the size of the whole form makes the body Florentine or Roman. The shaft of the column cannot be <sup>higher</sup> ~~greater~~ than its thickness multiplied a certain number of times by itself; in a similar manner the whole form of the body must attain to and not surpass a certain multiple of which the head is the unit. All parts of the body have thus their mathematical measurement; without being rigorously limited to this they approximate to it, and the different degrees of this approximation express a different character. The artist accordingly here comes in possession of a new resource; he can select small heads and elongated bodies like Michael Angelo, simple and monumental lines like Fra Bartolomeo, undulating contours and varied inflexions like Correggio. Balanced or disordered groups, upright or oblique attitudes, different planes and different compartments in his picture will furnish him with different symmetries. A fresco or a picture is a square, a rectangle, a circle, an archway, in

brief, a panel of space in which the human assemblage forms an edifice. Consider in the engravings of the "Martyrdom of St. Sebastian" by Baccio Bandinelli, or the "School of Athens" by Raphael, and you will appreciate this order of beauty which the Greeks by a word full of music called eurythmy. Look at the same subject treated by two painters, the "Antiope" by Titian and by Correggio, and you will appreciate the different effects of the geometry of lines. It is a new force which it is necessary to turn in the same sense as the others and which, neglected or badly directed, prevents character from having its full expression.

I come now to the last element which is a capital one, that of color. By themselves, and outside of their imitative purposes, colors, like lines, have a sense of their own. A gamut of colors which portray no real object may, like an arabesque of lines imitating no natural object, be either rich or meager, elegant or dull. The impression they make on us varies according to



their combination ; their combination therefore has an expression. A picture is a colored surface in which the different tones and the different degrees of light are distributed with a certain selection ; here you see its inward life ; it is for them an ulterior property ; it does not prevent their primitive property from having all its importance and all its rights, that these tones and these degrees of light should be shaped into figures, draperies and architectural designs. The special value of color is therefore enormous, and the direction which painters take in this respect determines the rest of their work. But in this element there are many other elements ; at first, the general degree of luminousness or of obscurity ; Guido paints white, silver-gray, slaty-gray and pale blue, and all in full light. Caravaggio paints black and an intense, earthy, charred brown, and all in opaque shadow. Again, the opposition of lights and darks in the same picture is more or less powerful, and more or less proportioned. You are familiar with the delicate gradation which, in Da Vinci, causes the form to

emerge insensibly out of the shadow ; with the exquisite gradation which, in Correggio, brings the strongest light out of the universal light ; with the violent emergence in Ribera of a clear tone suddenly bursting forth out of the lugubrious blackness ; with the humid and yellow atmosphere through which Rembrandt darts a ray of sunshine, or infiltrates it with some wandering gleam.—Finally, besides their degree of luminousness, tones, according as they are or are not complementary to each other,\* have their discords and their harmonies ; they are mutually attracted or repelled ; orange, violet, red, green, and all others, simple or commingled, thus form through their proximity, like musical notes through their succession, a full and strong, or rugged and rude, or soft and sweet harmony. Contemplate in the “*Esther*” of Veronese in the Louvre the charming succession of yellows which, vaguely pale, darkened, silvered, reddened, tinged with green and amethyst, and

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\* Chevreuil, “*Treatise on the Contrasts of Colors.*”

always tempered and allied together, melt into each other from the pale jonquil to the dead leaf and the burning topaz; or in the "Holy Family" of Giorgione, the powerful reds which from the almost black purple of the drapery go on diversifying and illuminating each other, spotted with ochre on the solid flesh, palpitating and trembling in the interstices of the fingers, spreading out bronzed upon a manly breast, and, impregnated by turns with light and shadow, falling at last upon the face of a young girl in an emanation of sunset glow. In these you will comprehend the expressive power of such an element. It is to figures what the accompaniment is to vocal music; and better still, for it is sometimes the song to which the figures are simply the accompaniment; from an accessory it gets to be a principal. But let its value be accessory, principal or simply equal to that of the others, it is no less evident that it is a distinct force, and that in order to express character its effect must harmonize with the other effects.

## IV.

According to this principle we will make a final classification of the works of painters. All things equal in other respects, we see that they will be more or less beautiful according as the convergence of effects in them is more or less complete; and this rule, applied to literary history, marking the successive periods of a literary age, gives us the means, if we know how to apply them to the history of painting, of defining the successive states of a school of art.

In the primitive period the work is still imperfect. Art is inadequate, and the ignorant artist knows not how to make all the effects converge. He handles some of them, often very well and with genius; but he has no suspicion of the others; a lack of experience prevents him from seeing them, or the atmosphere of civilization in which he lives diverts his eyes from them. Such is the state of art during the two

first ages of Italian painting. In spirit and in genius Giotto resembles Raphael ; he had the same fertility, the same facility, the same originality, the same beauty of invention,—his sentiment of harmony and nobleness was not less ; but the language was not formed and he only stammered while the other spoke. He had not studied under Perugino and in Florence, he was not familiar with antique statues. At that time the first glance only had been bestowed on the living body ; ignorant of the muscles, people did not see their expressive force ; they would not have dared to comprehend and love the fine human animal ; it smacked too much of paganism ; the sway of theology and of mysticism was too powerful. Hieratic and symbolic painting thus continues a century and a half without making use of its principal element.—The second age commences, and the goldsmith-anatomists, becoming painters, model for the first time in their pictures and in their frescoes solid bodies and well-jointed members. But they are still deficient in other parts of their art. They are

unconscious of that architecture of lines and masses which, seeking for ideal curves and proportions, transforms the real body into a beautiful body ; Verocchio, Pollaiuolo, Castagno, produce angular and ungraceful figures, all knotted with muscles, and which, according to a saying of Leonardo da Vinci, "resemble bags of nuts." They are unconscious of variety of action and physiognomy, and, in Perugino, Fra Filippo and Ghirlandajo, and in the ancient frescoes of the Sistine Chapel, the figures, passive, cold or ranged in monotonous files, seem to await their existence in the final inspiration which never comes. They are blind to the richness or delicacy of color, the personages of Signorelli, Credi and Botticelli being dull, dry and detached in sharp relief against a background without an atmosphere. It is necessary that Antonello da Messina should introduce into Italy painting in oil in order that the glow and combination of melting, lustrous tones should make warm blood flow in their veins. It is necessary that Leonardo da Vinci should discover the insensible

gradations of light in order that aerial perspective should cause the retreating fulness of their forms to emerge, and envelop their contours in the mild transparency of chiaroscuro. It is only at the end of the fifteenth century that all the elements of art, liberated one by one, can unite their forces in the hand of a master in order to manifest through their concord the character which he conceived.

On the other hand when, in the second half of the fifteenth century, painting declines the temporary convergence which had produced masterpieces becomes relaxed and can no longer be re-established. But recently it did not exist because the artist was not sufficiently learned; now it fails because he is too pedantic. In vain do the Caracci study with indefatigable patience and draw from all schools the most varied and most fecund processes. It is just this combination of discordant effects which reduces their work to an inferior position. Their sentiment is too weak to produce harmony; they take from one and then from another and are ruined in

borrowing. Their knowledge injures them in reuniting in the same effects that which cannot be united. The "Cephalus" of Annibal Caracci, in the Farnese palace, has the muscles of one of Michael Angelo's wrestlers, a stoutness and redundancy of flesh borrowed from the Venetians, a smile and cheeks taken from Correggio—reminding us disagreeably of a graceful and fat athlete. The "St. Sebastian" of Guido in the Louvre is the torso of an antique Antinoüs, bathed in a light which, in its glow, reminds one of that of Correggio, and in its bluish tone of that of Prudhon—disagreeably suggesting a sentimental and amiable ephebos of the palestrum. Everywhere, throughout this decadence, the expression of the head contradicts that of the body; you see the airs of saints, devotees, worldly women, sigisbees, grisettes, youthful pages, and domestics on vigorous forms and bodies full of muscular commotion; the whole together combines gods and saints, who are insipid declaimers, nymphs and Madonnas who are drawing-room goddesses, and, oftener still, certain personages



who, floating between two characters, fulfil the requirements of neither and are nothing. Similar disparities for a long time arrested Flemish painting in the midst of its career, when with Michael Coxcie, Martin Hemskirk, Francis Floris, Henry Goltzius, and John Rottenhamer, it was desirous of becoming Italian. In order that Flemish art should resume its enthusiasm and attain its end it was necessary that a new afflux of national inspiration should overshadow foreign importations and give a new impulse to the instincts of the race. Then, with Rubens and his contemporaries, the original idea of the *ensemble* reappeared; the elements of art which were grouped only to be in contradiction were linked together in order to become complete, and viable works replaced abortions.

Between periods of decline and infantile periods is placed ordinarily a period of efflorescence. But whether we meet it, as it generally happens, at the centre of the whole period, or in the slight interval which separates ignorance from false taste; or whether we find it, as

it sometimes happens, when it concerns one man or an isolated work, in an eccentric position, always is the masterpiece due to a universal convergence of effects. In support of this truth the history of Italian painting furnishes us with the most varied and most decisive examples. It is in pursuit of this unity that all the art of the masters is applied, and the delicacy of perception which constitutes their genius is wholly revealed by the opposition of their processes as well as by the coherence of their conception. You have remarked in Da Vinci a supreme and almost feminine elegance of visage, an indefinable smile, a profound expression of feature, the melancholy superiority or exquisite refinement of the soul, and rare or original attitudes in unison with waving suppleness of contour, with the mysterious charm of chiaroscuro, with vague depths of increasing shadow, with insensible gradations of form, with the strange beauty of vaporous perspectives. You have remarked with the Venetians an ample and rich light, a joyous and healthy consonance of related or antagonistic

tones, a sensual lustre of color in unison with splendor of decoration, with the freedom and magnificence of life, with the bold energy or with the patrician nobleness of head, with the voluptuous charm of ample and living flesh, with the easy and animated action of groups, with the universal expansion of happiness. In a fresco by Raphael sobriety of color suits the sculptural force and solidity of the figures, the calm architecture of the grouping and composition, the seriousness and simplicity of the heads, the temperate action of the attitudes and the serenity and moral elevation of the expression. A picture by Correggio is a sort of Alcinoüs' enchanted garden where the bewildering seduction of light wedded to light, the capricious and caressing grace of waving or broken lines, the glittering whiteness and soft rotundity of feminine forms, piquant irregularity of faces, the vivacity, the tenderness, the abandonment of expression and of action combine to form an exquisite and delicate dream of felicity, such as a fairy's magic and a woman's affection would prepare for her

lover. The entire work springs from one principal root ; a primitive and predominant sensation pushes on and ramifies to infinity the complex growth of effects ; with Fra Angelico it is the vision of supernatural illumination and a mystic conception of celestial bliss ; with Rembrandt it is the idea of an expiring light in a humid atmosphere and the mournful sentiment of poignant reality. You will find an idea of the same order determining and harmonizing lines of different species, the selection of types, the arrangement of groups, the expressions, the motions, the color in Rubens and in Ruysdael, in Poussin and Lesueur, in Prudhon and in Delacroix. Criticism labors in vain, it cannot define all the results that flow from it ; they are innumerable and too profound ; life is the same in works of genius and in those of nature ; it penetrates down to the infinitely small ; no analysis can reach the end of it. But in these as well as in those observation verifies the essential concordances, the reciprocal dependencies, the final direction and the harmonies of the *ensemble* but

whose entire detail it does not succeed in distinguishing.

## V.

We can now, gentlemen, take in the whole of art in a single glance, and comprehend the principle which assigns to each work its rank on the scale. We have established, according to our preceding studies, that a work of art is a system of parts, at one time drawn from every detail as it happens in architecture and in music, at another reproduced according to some real object as it happens in literature, sculpture and painting; and we are reminded that the purpose of art is to manifest by this *ensemble* some notable character. We have hence concluded that the merit of the work is greater proportionately as this character becomes more notable and more predominant. We have distinguished in the notable character two points of view, according as it is more important, that is to say more stable and more elementary; and according as it is

more beneficent, that is say, more capable of contributing to the preservation and to the development of the individual and of the group in which he is comprehended. We have seen that to these two points of view, according to which we may estimate the value of characters, correspond two scales by which we may value works of art. We have remarked that these two points of view are combined in a single one, and that, in short, the important or beneficent character is never but one force, measured at one time by its effects on others and, at another, by its effects on itself; whence it follows that character having two kinds of power has two kinds of value. We have then sought how, in a work of art, it can be more clearly manifested than in nature; and we have seen that it takes a more powerful relief when the artist, employing all the elements of his work, makes all their effects converge. Thus is established before us a third scale; and we have seen that works of art are so much more beautiful as character is imprinted and expressed

in them with a more universally predominant ascendancy. The masterpiece is that in which the greatest force receives the greatest development. In the language of the painter, the superior work is that in which the character possessing the greatest possible value in nature receives from art all the increase in value that is possible. Let me express the same matter to you in a less technical manner. The Greeks, our masters, teach us here the theory of art as well as everything else. Note the successive transformations which have been gradually erected in their temples, a *Jupiter mansuetus*, a *Venus of Milo*, a *Diana, huntress*, a *Juno* like that of the Villa Ludovisi, the *Fates* of the Parthenon, and all those perfect images whose mutilated fragments still suffice to show us the exaggerations and the inadequacies of our own art. The three steps of their conception are precisely the three steps which have led us to our doctrine. At the commencement their divinities are only the elementary and profound forces of the universe: the maternal

Earth, subterranean Titans, rustling streams the rain-giving Jupiter, the Hercules sun. A little later these same gods liberate their humanity buried in the brute energies of nature, and the martial Pallas, the chaste Artemis, the liberator Apollo, the Hercules vanquisher of monsters, all the beneficent powers form the noble choir of complete figures which Homer's poems are to place on thrones of gold. Ages pass away before they descend to the earth; it is necessary that lines and proportions, a long time manipulated, should reveal their resources and be able to maintain the burden of the divine idea which they are to bear. Finally, man's fingers imprint on bronze and on marble the immortal form; the primitive conception, at first elaborated in the mysteries of the temples, then transformed by the visions of the bard, attains its completion under the hand of the sculptor.









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